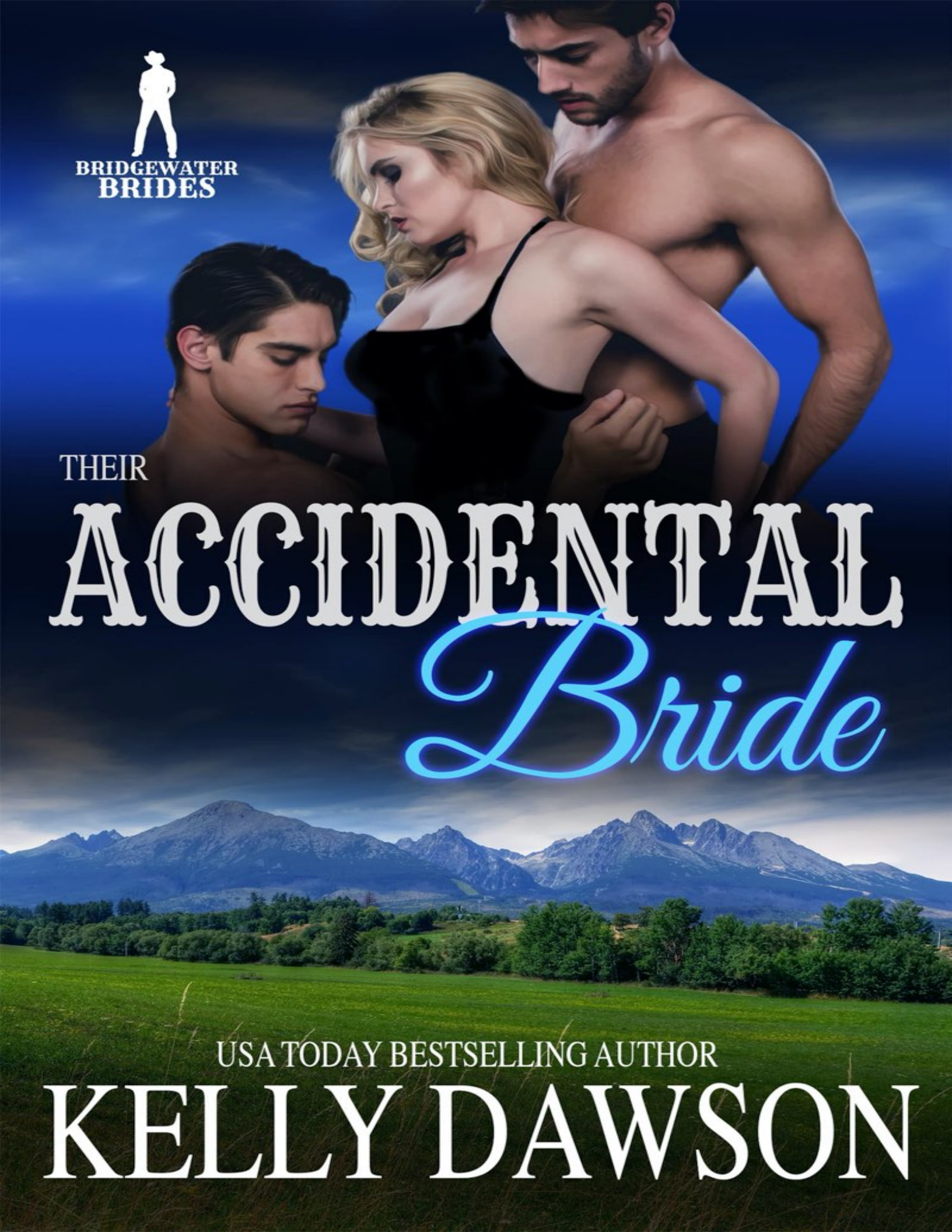
BRIDGEWATER
BRIDES
THEIR
ACCIDENTAL
Bride
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
KELLY DAWSON

THEIR ACCIDENTAL BRIDE

A BRIDGEWATER BRIDES NOVEL

KELLY DAWSON

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Welcome to Bridgewater, where one cowboy is never enough! *Their Accidental Bride* is published as part of the Bridgewater Brides World, which includes books by numerous authors inspired by Vanessa Vale's *USA Today* bestselling series. This is a steamy standalone read. Enjoy!

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1

ELISE

"YOU WILL MARRY HIM!" John, my brother, stabbed a finger in my general direction from where he sat behind the large, ornate desk that had once belonged to our father. One of the few pieces of furniture still left. John had sold nearly everything of value.

I shook my head. "I will not! He's mean and cruel." I shuddered, thinking of Mr. Yates, the man John wished for me to marry. He frightened me, with his small, mean eyes, big booming voice, and the two pistols he wore under his coat. Once, I saw him slap a woman in the street, causing her to fall to her knees. No, Mr. Yates was not a man I wished to marry.

I boldly met my brother's gaze. "I do not love him."

"This isn't about love, Elise."

"No." I cut my brother off. "It's about money. Everything's about money, isn't it?"

John had whittled away the fortune our father had left for us, and Mr. Yates was wealthy. John had promised him my hand in marriage as payment

for the substantial gambling debts he owed and Mr. Yates had accepted this arrangement, spreading the word all over Philadelphia that I was to be his wife. He was even planning an engagement party, predicted to be the biggest even of the year. Everyone who was anyone in Philadelphia society would be there. Except I couldn't go through with it. The very thought of becoming Mrs. Yates made me feel sick. I did not want to spend the rest of my life living in terror.

No doubt John also figured having a rich brother-in-law would guarantee him future funds, and he would be able to carry on living, and gambling, in the manner to which he had become accustomed. I had no such delusions. Mr. Yates was as selfish as he was cruel. Once he had me where he wanted me – under his thumb, living in fear for my life, entertaining his business cronies – John's access to any potential funds would dry up. I had no doubt.

"I will not marry him," I said again, more forcefully this time.

John slapped his palms against the desktop, the loud crack of his hands against the wood making me jump. His chair scraped backwards as he stood up and anger flashed across his face as he leaned forwards across the desk in a threatening manner. John was used to getting his own way. He wasn't used to being challenged. Especially not by me. Fear welled up in my throat. John and I had never been close. He was much older than me and our mother had died in childbirth while having me. John blamed me for her death. I had never believed he hated me, but he had never been particularly kind. I was an annoyance to be tolerated, rather than a baby sister to love and care for.

I swallowed back my fear and stood my ground. I wasn't as afraid of my brother as I was of Mr. Yates. John might be desperate, but he was my brother! Surely he wouldn't hurt me! At least he hadn't done in the past, when our father had been alive. My heart pounded as John and I looked at

each other, then he rounded the desk and stood in front of me, fury contorting his face into an ugly frown.

“You will marry him!” His loud voice was laced with anger.

“I will not!” I yelled bravely back.

Now, as we stood toe to toe, staring at each other, I realized I was wrong. John cared not a whit about me; he only cared that I do as he bid. He raised his hand to strike me and I turned and fled.

I could hear his footsteps pounding on the carpeted floor behind me as I ran from the room, but the accident John had been in last year was my saving grace – his limp slowed him down.

“Come back here!” he yelled. “You cannot hide from me!”

I didn’t reply. Instead, I picked up my skirts and ran down the stairs, knowing John could not follow at this fast pace. He would have to hold the banister and pick his way carefully, otherwise he would fall.

“You cannot run from your future!” my brother yelled from the landing as I flew into the kitchen and out the back door, onto the street.

As I ran, my fingers instinctively felt for the coins I’d secreted, sewn into the lining of my skirt. Good. They were still there. The few gold eagles I’d saved from my brother’s gambling were my path to freedom.

But where would I go? My family was well known in this part of Philadelphia thanks to our father’s business success, and my brother was feared, almost as much as Mr. Yates. John was used to getting what he wanted, and had used our father’s money to ensure he did. He had dangerous men at his beck and call, always ready to do his bidding. They weren’t aware that John’s funds had dried up and they would stop at nothing to carry out my brother’s orders. I didn’t know anybody who would hide me or protect me. Nobody would be willing to go against my powerful brother, and he was far more desperate to marry me off than I had realized.

Not wanting to draw attention to myself by running down the street, I slowed to a walk.

My only hope was in Mrs. Whittaker, who ran the mail-order bride business. I had often looked at her sign with curiosity when I was out shopping, but I had never been inside. There had never been a need; I had no shortage of suitors. Unfortunately John had chased all of them, except for Mr. Yates, off.

There was an abundance of lonely men out West looking for a wife, and Mrs. Whittaker's trade was brisk. In the last month, she had found husbands for three of my friends. Perhaps she would be able to help me, too. With a bit of luck, I could be on a train out of Philadelphia this afternoon.

The front door of Mrs. Whittaker's creaked as I opened it, and I winced at the sound. My arrival announced, Mrs. Whittaker came through another door from somewhere beyond and beckoned to me to follow her into a small parlour. She indicated a chair against the wall, inviting me to sit.

As I sat, Mrs. Whittaker looked me up and down doubtfully. I couldn't say I blamed her – she knew my family. I was sure she knew I was sorely lacking in everything required of a wife out on the Frontier. I was pretty. But a man out West probably needed more than just pretty.

"Can you cook?"

My smile faltered. I could not cook. I had spent three years in Lady Margaret's School for Girls, learning to host dinner parties and such things. I could smile and laugh graciously, dance, and manage household staff. I could do needlepoint. I was well versed in skills befitting a lady. Cooking was not among them.

But I refused to let my hopes be dashed so soon and I nodded, avoiding Mrs. Whittaker's knowing gaze.

There was a long pause. She didn't believe me. So I looked up at her. "Please, I'm desperate. I have to get away." I didn't want to beg, but anything was better than becoming Mrs. Roger Yates. "I have money. Not much, but some." For reassurance, I silently traced the outline of the hard

discs with my fingers. I would part with them all, if I had to. I would pay her whatever she asked, if only she would help me escape.

Mrs. Whittaker did not smile. But she did nod and stand up. I couldn't imagine I was the first woman to come to her desperate. She rifled through a table in the corner for a moment and came back, thrusting a tatty photograph at me. "Coleton Mallone," she told me. "From the Montana Territory. He wants a wife who can cook for a team, keep house, and is pleasant to look at."

I watched her eyes scan down the piece of paper she was holding, perhaps a letter that accompanied the photograph. "He says he is kind, and will treat a wife well."

I ran my finger over the rough edge of the likeness and breathed a sigh of relief. The Montana Territory was far away. I would be safe there.

In the small, grainy image, my soon-to-be husband wasn't smiling. In fact, his unkempt eyebrows and carefully waxed mustache gave him a rather stern expression, but his eyes were kind. Just as he'd said in his letter. Momentarily, guilt washed over me. I was not what Mr. Mallone was looking for. But I swallowed, steeling myself. I could learn, and I would learn, to do everything Coleton required of me, if only he would provide me with a safe home. Although the likeness showed a stern man, he was handsome too, and butterflies danced inside me. His shoulders were broad and he looked strong – attributes I found very attractive. Lines crinkling at the corners of his eyes and mouth showed that he liked to laugh. My stomach flipped in excitement.

"That settles it then." Mrs .Whittaker stood up. "I will wire Mr. Mallone and tell him you're coming. You go home and pack what you need. Just what you need, mind. Life is very different in the Montana Territory. You will have no need of a dozen different gowns. But you will need a workaday dress."

I felt my face pale as the older lady's gaze scrutinized me.

“There is a train in the morning,” she said. “Make sure you’re on it.”

“In the morning?” I whispered, almost numb with fear. I couldn’t let John find me! Where could I hide? Where could I go until then? “I… I can’t…” my voice trailed off. “My brother… I can’t go home.” How would I wait until the morning?

Mrs. Whittaker frowned, walked to the window, and peered out around the curtain. “Did anyone see you come here?” she asked me.

I shook my head. “I don’t think so.”

“You can stay here,” Mrs. Whittaker told me. “But you must be careful. I don’t want trouble brought here.”

Relief washed over me and I felt much of the tension leave my body. Mrs. Whittaker had obviously done this before. In her home I would be safe, as long as I could get my things without John seeing me. My fear and uncertainty must have been visible on my face because, again, Mrs. Whittaker took control.

“Wait until that worthless brother of yours goes to the saloon this evening,” she suggested. “Pack your suitcase, put it out the back, and return here. I will have a boy collect it.”

I must have looked doubtful, for she stepped closer to me, reached out and touched my hand. “Don’t worry,” she reassured me. “I have helped many women in your situation. They were all afraid too, and I got them out safely. By the time he realizes you are gone, you will be on the train headed west and into the arms of Mr. Mallone.”

I swallowed. No doubt the security Mrs. Whittaker was offering me would not come cheap. But I would pay it willingly. “How much do I pay you?”

Mrs. Whittaker shook her head. “Nothing. Mr. Mallone has already paid more than enough. He has sent money for a train ticket, too.” For the first time, Mrs. Whittaker smiled. “I hope you find happiness, Elise. I know life hasn’t been easy for you.”

How did she know that? I opened my mouth to speak but Mrs. Whittaker shook her head, silencing me. “It’s my business to know,” she told me. “This is what I do. You will be fine.”

I squared my shoulders, took a deep breath, and repeated Mrs. Whittaker’s words over and over in my head. *I will be fine. I will be fine.* Mentally, I listed the things I would need to take with me to my new life. There wasn’t much I wanted, it would all fit in one suitcase. I settled back in the chair in Mrs. Whittaker’s parlour to wait until it was time to go and pack my things and sadness welled up within me. Tomorrow morning I would be leaving behind the only place I had ever known and I wasn’t even able to say goodbye.

3 WEEKS LATER…

THE WHISTLE BLEW, startling me, and the train pulled into the station. Quickly, I tucked the likeness that I had been staring at back into my valise and stood. A few of us disembarked, and I looked around expectantly for Coleton, as the porter retrieved my suitcase. I couldn't see him. There were people everywhere; men, women and children filling the wooden boardwalks, horses and carriages riding down the wide, dusty street. But none looked anything like the stern but good-looking man burned into my memory.

Soon, the train moved off and the passengers dispersed, leaving me alone on the platform. Coleton was nowhere to be seen. I tapped my foot impatiently. Had he forgotten I was coming? Surely not! The letter he had wired before I had left assured me he would be there. We were to stand before the preacher and be married before we journeyed to his ranch to begin our new life together. His words had been full of hope, excitement,

and promise. It was inconceivable that he had forgotten me. No, he was just behind. He would be here soon, I reassured myself.

I tilted my head to the sun, shifting my bonnet back slightly so I could feel the gentle breeze on my face, and waited. And waited.

I looked around, surveying my surroundings. Although there were a lot of people and buildings and businesses, Butte was a smaller town than I expected. Much smaller than Philadelphia, anyway. Beyond the town was nothing but rugged wilderness, with mountains visible in the distance. Already I was homesick for the buildings and crowds of home.

As time wore on, my foot got tired of tapping, and I feared that he had, indeed, forgotten. Then, with a little gasp, my hand flew to my mouth. What if he had changed his mind? No! Perish the thought! Perhaps he did not wish for me to be his wife anymore? Perhaps he had somehow discovered my little deception? I had to find out.

But first, I would need to eat. I looked around. I had to go somewhere close for I could not carry my heavy suitcase far. The closest place I could see was a saloon. As I watched, a well-dressed lady went inside, on the arm of a gentleman. It must be a respectable enough establishment if women were among its patrons. It would have to do.

I entered, then ordered my meal and ate quickly, not wanting to waste any more of the day, then I approached the keeper of the saloon. Perhaps he could help me hire a buggy and point me in the direction of Coleton's ranch.

The piece of paper the name of his ranch was written on had gotten crumpled in my valise. I spread it out on the bar and smoothed it out as best I could, but it was still difficult to read. Luckily, he could read enough of it to know the ranch. And he knew Coleton.

I held my breath for a moment as a frown passed over the barkeep's face. He looked down at the paper, then at the ground, then at me. He cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry miss, but Coleton Mallone is dead."

My heart plummeted. I felt all the color drain from my face. I was alone in the Montana Territory. A widow without ever having met my husband.

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2

SHANE

“WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT!"

I looked up at Roscoe's shout and followed where his finger was pointing. A runaway horse, with a buggy bouncing along behind, was streaking across the prairie. A woman, her fair hair flying out behind her, was struggling to control the runaway, standing precariously in the jolting contraption, tugging on the reins, screaming at the top of her lungs.

"With that racket, it's no wonder the horse bolted," I commented, but I didn't miss a beat as I kicked my mount into a gallop alongside Roscoe. No matter the reason for her predicament, the damsel needed to be rescued before she fell out and hurt herself.

Reckless! That’s what she was. Standing up in an out-of-control buggy like that, with no care for her safety at all. What did she think she was doing? She could *die.* As we pushed our horses to catch up with her, I knew I couldn’t watch another woman die.

Following Roscoe’s lead, I galloped up one side of the runaway horse while Roscoe came up the other. We both leaned far out of the saddle, reaching for the reins, gently easing the animal to a stop. It was then that I was able to get a proper look at the terrified driver. Even with tears streaming down her cheeks and her face contorted in a frightened scream, I could see she was young and very pretty. Far too young and pretty to be racing through the Montana Territory unchaperoned.

I slid down off my horse, leaving the reins dangling. My horse was well trained, he would not move. The lady was trying to be brave, but it was clear she was terrified. Her face was pale, she was shaking, and she was on the verge on hyperventilating. It looked like she’d had a shock. While Roscoe held the panting horse still, I reached for the lady, taking her hands to help her down. Her hands were small, smooth, the nails well kept. She wore no wedding ring. They weren’t the hands of a woman who was used to work. What was a lady who had been so gently reared, doing way out here, alone?

She stepped down and collapsed against me, her small body wracked with sobs. She was trying to speak, but she was crying so hard I couldn’t make any sense of what she was saying.

“Sssshhhh,” I whispered, rubbing her back, holding her close. Her ample breasts brushed against me and my cock hardened in my pants at the closeness of her soft body against mine. It had been a long time since I’d held a woman. Too long. Her feminine curves were perfect. She fitted against me so well. The top of her head didn’t quite reach my chin; the perfect height for me to bend my head to kiss. The top few buttons on her blouse had been torn off, likely in her battle with the runaway beast, and I looked down at her, my gaze resting directly on her heaving bosom. Definitely more than a handful.

My other hand slipped around her trim waist, pulling her in closer.

Her tears wet my shirt but still I held her close. She was awakening desires in me that I thought were long buried and forgotten. When Rose had died, I had vowed I would never want another woman again. And up until now, I hadn't. But there was something about the woman in my arms. Her vulnerability and fear brought out my protective instincts and her body brought out stirrings of lust. I wanted her. My cock throbbed.

Finally she stopped sobbing and let go of me, reaching for her bag. She pulled out several papers and thrust them at me, still breathing heavily, still looking frightened. She looked ready to flee at any moment. I took the papers and quickly scanned the barely legible script.

"You're a mail order bride?" Disappointment welled within me. She belonged to someone else.

"The name," she gasped, still panting for breath. "Do you know him?"

I read the letter her prospective husband had written, outlining the qualities he was looking for in a wife. If the woman standing in front of me met those requirements, she would be a very good wife indeed. She was certainly very pleasant to look at, she had fitted perfectly against me. And if she was a capable cook and able to keep a clean house too, Roscoe and I would have no complaints.

Then I read the name. Coleton Mallone. He was dead and buried. A grisly accident had claimed his life just three days ago.

"Is it true? Is he dead?" she asked, her voice small, tinged with desperation.

"Yes ma'am," I told her. "It is."

I passed the papers over to Roscoe to read before turning back to the lady. "He was a good man." Her lower lip quivered but there was a stubborn tilt to her chin. She squared her shoulders, but there was no hiding her distress.

"I'll have to go back then," she whispered, sounding utterly bereft.

How far had she journeyed? Where was she going back to? More importantly, to whom was she going back to? As a mail-order bride, she had obviously come west for a reason. Ladies didn't just marry a man they'd never met, even a man as good as Coleton had been, unless they had no other choice.

"Go back where?" Roscoe asked.

The lady startled at the unexpected voice coming from behind her but she gathered her composure quickly. If nothing else, she was courageous. But she couldn't completely hide her fear. Whatever it was she was running from, it frightened her.

"Philadelphia." Her hands flew to her mouth as she choked on a sob.

I looked across at Roscoe, one eyebrow raised in question, and he nodded. She would be ours. Roscoe and I were getting along just fine by ourselves, but it was mighty lonely at night and our small cabin needed a woman's touch.

Roscoe and I had been friends since childhood. Ever since he had fought off my bully on the first day of school, we'd been inseparable. Roscoe wasn't bigger or stronger than me anymore, but he was still my best friend. He'd stood beside me when I'd lost my Rose, supported me in my grief. We'd shared just about everything since then, including our house and small ranch in Bridgewater. It was almost inevitable that we would share a wife. I hadn't been willing to before, but I was now. We would share her between us, in the Bridgewater way, both of us devoted to her pleasure. Both of us keeping her safe. Both of us teaching her all the ways in which a woman can please a man.

"No." I shook my head, but she acted as if she hadn't heard me. Her face was still buried in her hands. Long, fair curls fell through her fingers. Her bosom heaved with each breath she took. My cock stirred again. I wanted to fuck her until she was smiling, until she forgot the reason for her tears.

“Darkness is falling,” Roscoe told her. “Where are you going to go?”

“I’ll go back to Butte and stay at the hotel,” she announced determinedly.

“No!” My voice was louder than I intended. “It’s not safe for a woman travelling alone. That town has all sorts of rotten jaspers hiding in it. Besides, do you even know where the town is? Which direction to go?”

She looked around. It was clear that she was lost.

“I will be fine,” she insisted.

I will be fine. They were the last words Rose, my fiancé, had said to me. She’d refused to heed my warning and her carelessness had gotten her killed. She’d gone into town by herself, without me, and had gotten caught in the crossfire of a gunfight. *I will be fine* spoken in Rose’s sweet voice echoed in my head. It had been two years since my Rose had died but it felt like only yesterday. Memories of her came flooding back. I remembered how helpless I’d felt that day. Rose hadn’t listened to me and I hadn’t been able to protect her. I was not going to let that happen again. I was not going to let this foolhardy woman, who didn’t understand the dangers of the west, get herself killed. Not when I could prevent it.

“Bridgewater isn’t far from here,” Roscoe said. “Our home. You’ll be safe there.”

“I’m not afraid of any… what did you call them? Rotten jaspers? They don’t scare me.”

“You won’t get back to town before nightfall,” I warned her, but she reached for the reins Roscoe still held. A growl lodged itself deep in my throat. “If you aren’t the most infuriating woman!” I muttered. In one swift movement I dropped to one knee in the dirt and hauled her over my dusty thigh, wrestling with her skirts as she kicked and squirmed, until finally, I was able to pull them up.

“You let go of me!” she screamed.

I didn’t let her go. Instead, I parted her drawers and laid a crisp spank across her rounded, creamy buttocks.

“I will let you up when you agree to mind me and not before,” I informed her, swatting her sharply again. “It’s a different world out here to back in Philadelphia.” Another smack punctuated my words. “You’re obviously not aware of the dangers and you won’t listen when we try to tell you.” I flattened my hand and spanked her twice more. “My Rose was killed because she was reckless. I will not let that happen to you.”

She was kicking and twisting so much I could see the dewy wetness glistening in the sweet folds of her swollen pussy. The movement of her body against my cock made it strain against my pants. I couldn’t wait to sink it into her. I spanked her again, a little bit harder, watching as her bouncing globes turned pink under my touch. I traced my finger along the edge of a handprint. “Are you ready to mind me yet?”

“Yes!” she gasped, pressing her hands against the ground to lever her body upwards. I held her fast. “I will do as you say!” she promised.

“Good.” I let her up.

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3

ROSCOE

STILL HOLDING the reins in one hand, I reached out for the lady and helped her to her feet. My breathing was almost as labored as hers was. She'd been wide open to my gaze when she'd kicked her feet wildly during her punishment and the sight of her glistening cunny made my balls ache.

She was ours. She may not know it yet, but she would soon. We would make sure of it. I couldn't wait to claim her, to fill her holes with my seed.

I wasn't looking for a wife. After seeing how miserable my lying, cheating parents had made each other, I didn't want that for myself. I'd left home as soon as I could to escape their constant fighting and Shane had been my only companion. I liked it that way. But now here was a woman, in the middle of nowhere, that we'd come across quite by accident. She had nowhere to go. Returning to Philadelphia obviously terrified her. I wanted her. Me and Shane, we *both* wanted her. We would share her, claim her together.

The proud carriage of her body revealed a stubborn defiance, as she bravely brushed down her skirts. Her face was flushed. Her blue eyes sparked. Was it anger or arousal that danced there? I wasn't sure.

I didn't let go of her arm and she didn't pull it away. Instead she turned, so she could look at me better, and I felt her gaze rake up and down my body. I saw her lips part ever so slightly. That spark in her eyes flashed.

"I'm pleased to see you have more manners than your barbaric companion," she told me, in cultured tones. She'd been raised well. The way she spoke suggested an education in an expensive finishing school, not just learning basic reading, writing and arithmetic in a one-room schoolhouse out here in the mountains. Did she have the skills necessary to survive out here? If she'd been honest in responding to Coleton's letter, she did.

"My barbaric companion saved your life." I did not smile. "Perhaps he did not act like a gentleman, but he is right when he said you do not understand the dangers of the west. You would not have made it back to town alone; there is no law out here. Not like what you're used to."

She wrenched her arm from my grasp and stood between Shane and I. She looked about to cry. "What am I to do?"

"Come to Bridgewater with us," I told her. "Shane and I, we will keep you safe. Whatever it is you're running from, we'll protect you."

I looked over her head at Shane. He nodded. He wasn't willing to let her go any more than I was. Not now that we'd found her. She was ours. I was glad we'd found her. Shane hadn't been the same since he'd lost his first love, Rose, and it would do him good to have a woman again. Rose had been Shane's alone, but I knew he didn't want a woman to himself again. He wanted to share one, like all the men on Bridgewater did. The responsibility of keeping a woman safe out here was too much for just one man. We would do well, sharing a bride between us.

There was fear in her eyes, but no more than there'd been before, when she'd learned that Coleton was dead. She had no reason to trust us. But she didn't really have a choice.

I smiled. I was not given to smiling, but I wanted to put her at ease. "Come." I extended my arm to her, she took it, resting her fingers in the crook of my elbow. I kept a grip on the reins and handed her up into the buggy, climbing up next to her and settling myself on the hard wooden seat. We waited while Shane tied my horse to the back, and mounted his own steed.

She sat stiffly, squirming uncomfortably, but her body was close to mine. She could have moved over if she wanted to, widening the gap between us, but she didn't.

"I don't even know your name." She spoke softly, but her eyes met mine and her gaze was steady. She'd obviously decided to meet her future bravely. Her courage made me like her even more. I had no time for weak, timid women. The Montana Territory was no place for a woman who was frightened of her own shadow. If she was to be our wife, she would need to be honest. Hardworking. Resilient and brave. And she'd need to be willing to learn. We had lots to teach her, Shane and I. Things to do with her pleasure, and with ours.

"Roscoe," I introduced myself.

Shane rode up alongside us. "I'm Shane. And you are?"

"I'm Elise. Elise Templeton."

"Elise." The name rolled off my tongue. "A pretty name for a pretty lady."

She smiled, and her whole face lit up. If I'd been attracted to her before, it was nothing to the way my body responded now. My cock strained against my pants, begging to be let out. On a whim, I slid my arm around her shoulders and drew her in close. After just a few seconds she leaned

against me and I felt her relax. She didn't seem afraid now. In fact, she seemed anything but.

Darkness was falling when we arrived at our small ranch on the outskirts of Bridgewater. Our wooden cabin and the fields beyond were bathed in a golden glow, light from the rising moon. Beside me, Elise sucked in a breath. It did look beautiful. My arm tightened around her. I was proud of the life Shane and I had built together and couldn't wait to share it with her.

As Shane took care of the horses, I took Elise, and her suitcase, inside. I lit the lamp and showed her around. Our cabin was not big, but it had everything we needed. Two bedrooms. Comfortable chairs. A decent stove in the kitchen for cooking on and a wooden table to eat at. It was simple, but clean, and Elise could decorate it however she wanted. I watched her with interest as she took in her surroundings. She was obviously used to fancier dwellings than this, as disappointment was evident on her face.

"Shane and I built this house ourselves. And everything in it," I told her, and winced at the defensiveness in my tone. What did it matter if our home didn't compare to what she had left behind in Philadelphia? Things were different out here. Still, I wanted her to like it. I wanted her to be proud of what we had achieved, all by ourselves. Honestly. Not through swindling and cheating like my parents had done. Everything Shane and I had, we'd worked for.

Slowly, Elise smiled. "I like it," she declared. "It's nice and cozy."

I knelt at the stove and lit a fire in the grate and listened to Elise's gentle, even breathing and the soft lilt of her voice. "Father was a successful businessman and our house was large, but it lacked warmth. Servants kept it clean and my aunt came to supervise the dinner parties father threw for his business, but it didn't feel like this. This feels like…. It feels like a home."

"Where was your ma?" I hadn't meant to ask the question, it just slipped out, but I was curious. Did she have a useless, quarrelsome mother like I

had?

“I never knew her. She died having me.”

“I’m sorry.” And I was. My mother might have been useless, but I think it was better than not having one at all. She hadn’t been a shrew all the time. I did have some fond memories, back from when I was very young.

Elise shrugged as though she didn’t care, but a glimmer of pain flitted across her face. Of course she cared. I watched her stare at the flickering flames. She looked lost in thoughts. Memories, perhaps?

“You can cook?” I asked her. “Coleton wanted a wife who could cook.”

Without looking at me, she nodded. She seemed a bit hesitant. Could she cook, or couldn’t she? It didn’t matter to me either way, Shane and I would teach her everything she needed to know. But I didn’t want a dishonest wife. Neither would Shane. I knew what dishonesty did to a marriage and I didn’t want a part of it.

Footsteps on the wooden porch heralded Shane’s arrival. Elise looked up and smiled, her beauty stirring life into my cock once again.

It was about time we showed her what it meant to be ours. Awaken the arousal that lay dormant within her. We wouldn’t claim her fully until she became our wife, but we could introduce her to the pleasure that awaited her. We could, and would, make her body dance with desire.

Shane read my mind. He always could, seemed like. I guess that happened when two people knew each other as long as we had, and shared everything.

I reached for Elise at the same time Shane did, and although her smile faltered just a bit, she came with us willingly enough. She seemed slightly afraid, but also eager to see what we had in store for her.

“We’re not going to hurt you, I promise. You have our word. We will protect you, always.” My voice was gruff, husky with arousal.

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4

ELISE

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN afraid of these men, but I wasn't. There was something about them that made me feel safe. When I thought about Mr. Yates I felt nothing but fear and disgust. But when I thought about these men right here, there was none of that. I trusted them. I didn't know why, but I did. For some reason, I knew they wouldn't hurt me. Even Shane, when he'd manhandled me over his lap and spanked me soundly, hadn't really hurt me. Oh, he'd hurt my bottom. And my pride. But he hadn't frightened me. And when Roscoe had climbed up into the wagon next to me and held me securely for the entire journey, I felt like I'd belonged right there next to him, with his powerful body right there alongside mine and his strong arm around my shoulders protecting me.

Besides, what choice did I have? Returning to Philadelphia, to John and Mr. Yates, wasn't an option. It was much better to take my chances with the two men beside me, and trust my instincts about them were correct.

They were certainly handsome. Both were tall, dark and muscular. Neither of them looked to be very old; just a few years older than me. In their early twenties, perhaps. One of them, Roscoe, appeared to be slightly older, and a dark close-trimmed beard shadowed his jaw. I'd already felt how hard and solid his body was, and as his fingers enclosed around my wrist, my tummy somersaulted. When Shane took my other arm, my heart skipped a beat and my breath hitched in my throat. He was every bit as tall, muscular and strong as Roscoe was and his dark eyes blazed with passion. He filled me with excitement. Both of them did.

I followed where they led, through a door and into a bedroom. Shane let go of my arm and lit the lantern. A bright quilt covering the bed was the only color in the room and even that looked gloomy in the dim light. A heavy oak dressing table stood in the corner and there were no curtains framing the window. I could look directly outside and see the stars. It was a very masculine room. It would do well with a feminine touch.

Roscoe lowered himself to the bed and tugged me down to sit beside him then he gently pressed me backwards, arranging a pillow carefully under my head.

"What are you doing?" I wasn't afraid, merely curious. I was naïve to the ways of the world.

"We're going to show you what it means to be ours, sweetheart," Roscoe rumbled in a deep, throaty voice.

"Yours? Both of you?" I was confused. How could they both want me?

"Yes. Ours," Shane confirmed. "It's the Bridgewater way," he said, as though the simple explanation made it all clear.

"I don't understand. How? Why?" I let my voice trail off.

"The founders of Bridgewater spent time in Mohamir," Roscoe said. "It's the custom there to share one woman between two men."

If that was supposed to explain this curious practice, it didn't. I was still confused. I knew nothing of Mohamir. My education didn't extend to

geography. Or history. I knew very little of other places, or their ways, and the idea of having two husbands was completely foreign to me. It just wasn't done. Was it?

"Two husbands," I mused. "Is that legal?"

"You'll marry Roscoe," Shane said. "He's the eldest. But you will belong to us both."

"The Mohamiran, and Bridgewater way, means the woman will always be cherished and protected, and if something happens to one of her men, she won't be left alone," Roscoe said, like the arrangement they were proposing was the most natural thing in the world.

I was silent for a moment as I tried to digest what they were saying, and accept the twist my life seemed to have taken. *Two husbands.* The words spun around and around in my brain, banging against the edges, until it started to seem like a good idea.

"Oh." It made sense, I supposed. This way, I wouldn't have to choose between them. Because how could I choose? Both of them set my heart aflutter. Both of them were handsome, strong, kind and gentle. I'd felt that for myself. Even Shane manhandling me had been done for the right reasons: protecting me. Keeping me safe. Oh how I longed to be safe! Maybe I would be, now.

I'd come to the Montana Territory prepared to marry one man I'd never met. And now, completely by accident, I'd ended up with two of them. And then it occurred to me. "Was Coleton going to share me with someone as well? He didn't say anything in his letter."

"I don't think so love," Shane answered. "He didn't live in Bridgewater."

"Oh." The term of endearment made my tummy flip. Warmth spread inside me. It felt right, that he spoke in such an intimate manner, like I was his already.

“But you’ll share me? Both of you? Together? How does that work?” The physical aspect of things had me confused. Aunt Nellie had told me little of such matters. Only that I must do my wifely duty. But she certainly hadn’t told me anything about how to please two husbands. I didn’t even really know how to please one.

“We’ll show you,” Roscoe answered simply.

I swallowed, as Roscoe brushed his fingers over my cheek. His thumb was rough and leathery as he slid it over my lips. My skin was left tingling where he’d touched.

My pulse raced as he lowered his face and pressed his mouth to where his thumb had been. My lips parted of their own volition to accept his eager tongue as his mouth melded into mine. I’d never been kissed before and Roscoe’s magical mouth made my head spin with desire. His beard scratched my cheek but I only noticed that for a moment because his kiss took my breath away. His tongue in my mouth, flicking against mine, sent a sweet ache to my bosom. The air around us seemed to spark. Did he notice it too? Or was it just me being affected? He deepened the kiss, claiming me hungrily, urgently, his hands cupping my face, holding me tight, not letting me go. That sweet ache spread through my body, radiating outwards from my core. His mouth was fixed on mine, claiming me in such a primal way, leaving me in no doubt that I was theirs.

While Roscoe kissed me, Shane positioned himself between my legs on the bed then lifted up my skirts and wrestled with my petticoat. He untied my drawers and slid them down my thighs. I squirmed with anticipation. What was he going to do to me? Before I could even think about what was happening he had his fingers *there*, pressed against my feminine folds, sending sparks shooting through me. I gasped against Roscoe’s mouth and my back arched all by itself, inviting Shane to touch me more.

I reached out to touch them but Roscoe caught my wrists and held them above my head, pressed against the bed. “No,” he whispered in my ear.

“You are to lie still and let us pleasure you.”

“But –“

“No buts.” He touched his finger to my lips. “Hush.

Shane’s mouth replaced his fingers, licking and sucking on my swollen sex where his fingers had been. His mouth down there was so unexpected, and felt so naughty, yet I didn’t want him to stop. My eyes widened as his hot tongue explored my pussy, making my pulse race and my whole body tingle.

“Oh!” I moaned as Roscoe kissed his way down my throat, all the way to my breasts, kissing the edge of my nipple, sucking it into his mouth. At the same time, Shane delved inside me with his tongue, driving me wild with desire.

Wifely duty? This was no duty. Aunt Nellie clearly had no idea what she was talking about.

Sparks flew up and down my body and I writhed on the bed under their touch. I’d never felt like this before. I hadn’t known it was possible for my body to feel so alive. All my nerve endings were on fire as Shane and Roscoe both worked their magic with their fingers and tongues.

“Oh!” I tried to stop my shameful sounds of arousal but it was impossible. The most incredible sensations ricocheted through my body, stretching everything tight, winding me up like a top, making me hot and achy and wanting.

“Oh my!” This was wrong. So wrong. But it felt so good! I tilted my pelvis up, offering them my body, silently begging them for more.

They obliged me. Their fingers and tongues moved faster and faster against me, flicking lightly, teasing me, tormenting me. Still sucking on my nipple and caressing my breasts, Roscoe reached down with his other hand, sliding his rough fingers down my torso, to the little nub at the top of my pussy. He pinched it lightly between forefinger and thumb. Shane’s tongue delved deeper inside me and the thin thread holding me captive snapped. I

arched my back and squealed out my pleasure like a common hussy as my whole body exploded. I was flying! I couldn't breathe, couldn't think. I could only feel. And what I felt as the earth shattered around me and wave after wave of ecstasy washed over me was amazing.

I lay back on the pillows, sated and spent, as my body trembled. Shane and Roscoe both grinned.

Roscoe took my chin in his hand and looked straight into my eyes. "This is what it means to be ours, sweetheart. Do you want it?"

"Yes!" I cried. "Yes, yes!"

There was no doubt in my mind for a moment. I had never, even in my wildest imaginations, dreamed that I would have two husbands. But after what they had just done to me I had to wonder how one could possibly be enough?

I closed my eyes for a moment, trying to catch my breath. All of the women I knew who only had one husband, were definitely missing out.

The bed shook as Shane and Roscoe both stood up and I opened my eyes to look at them. Both of them looked sheepish, almost regretful. Their shirts were untucked, their hair ruffled. But still, they looked so handsome. They were both by far the best looking men I'd ever met. Huge, too. So much bigger than my brother. I felt dwarfed as I stood up beside them.

"We'd better take you to Emma, Kane and Ian's house for the night. They're the closest," Roscoe said. "Dress yourself sweetheart. Then we'll go before it gets any later."

I looked at him in confusion. Go? Why?

Roscoe must have read my mind. "It's not proper for you to stay with us tonight," he said.

I looked at him, amused. "Not proper?" I asked. "After what you've just done to me?" There was no part of my body they hadn't seen or touched. Who did they think they were fooling, shipping me off to stay elsewhere?

Were appearances really that important? Maybe things out here weren't so different to Philadelphia, after all.

"We've already gone too far. We don't want to risk your reputation."

"Shouldn't that be up to me?" I asked.

"No. It's a matter of honor not to debauch our wife before the wedding. If you're not here, we won't be able to give in to temptation," Shane said.

I nodded. That made sense. I didn't like it, but I understood it. I'd only just met these men and didn't want to leave them so soon. Especially if it meant meeting even more strangers. But if it was what they wanted, I would do it.

"Who are these people, then?" I asked.

"Friends," Roscoe said. "Ian and Kane share Emma between them."

"Ah. A Bridgewater marriage."

"Yes," Shane agreed. "That's the way it's done here."

"It still seems strange," I mused.

"You'll get used to it," Shane said. And he was right, I would. Already, I had accepted it for myself. Before too much longer, I would think it was perfectly normal.

It was dark outside. Clouds muted the light of the moon. But I could see the gentle glow of lamps in the window of a house in the distance and I trusted Shane and Roscoe to deliver me there safely. I clung to the arms of my men and tried not to think about the creatures that inhabited the dark night. Snakes, scorpions. Coyotes. There was a snuffle behind us and I jumped, forced a scream to stay in my throat, and pressed myself closer to Roscoe.

"It's just a cow, sweetheart. It won't hurt you," he crooned. But I noticed he held me tighter anyway, just to reassure me.

Shane moved a bit closer to me. "We'll protect you, my love."

It felt nice, being sandwiched between the two big, burly men. Even though I still barely knew them, they made me feel safe.

They introduced me to Emma and her two husbands, Kane and Ian. Both men had thick accents. Scottish? I wasn't sure. I'd never heard the brogue before and I had to listen carefully to make sense of what they said.

Emma bustled around efficiently, settling me in a big, comfortable chair in front of the fire, serving me bread and jam. Her friendly smile broke through my nervousness and immediately put me at ease. The men went outside to talk. When they came back in, it was just for Shane and Roscoe to say good night.

"We'll be back first thing in the morning," Shane told me. "Tomorrow we'll go into Butte, return your buggy and stand before the preacher." He held my shoulders, brushed my cheek with his thumb. "That will give you a chance to change your mind about staying with us."

I nodded. I wouldn't be changing my mind, though. Of that, I was certain. After the wicked things they had just done to my body, there was no way I could leave them now. Not now that they had claimed me. I was theirs.

For the rest of the evening my hosts asked me questions about my past in Philadelphia, but I kept most of my life there close to my chest. I didn't need their pity when they learned my brother sold me to someone cruel, and I didn't want them to look down on me when they figured out I didn't possess any of the skills necessary for a life out here. But I told them enough to be polite. They seemed like they were very nice people, and I hoped Emma would become a good friend. I could use a good friend, especially because I had left the friends I'd had in Philadelphia, behind.

They also told me a little about themselves, and Bridgewater, and Shane and Roscoe. Kane and Ian both spoke highly of my men, respect evident in their tones. Shane and Roscoe hadn't been in Bridgewater as long as some of the other families, but they both worked hard, and they fitted in well. I learned that Shane had a blacksmith shop and Roscoe had planted their small ranch out in crops. Together, they would be able to provide well for

me. Perhaps not as well as Mr. Yates could have done, but I didn't care about money; there were far more important things. Shane and Roscoe didn't frighten me, and that was worth more than all the money in the world.

Watching Kane and Ian with Emma, I couldn't help but smile. Both men clearly loved her. They spoke to her tenderly, and their eyes twinkled brightly every time they looked at her. Emma also seemed content having two men to serve and love. She radiated happiness and confidence – the confidence of a woman who knew she was cherished. I hoped with all my heart that my marriage would be as happy.

Later, as I lay in the strange bed with the covers pulled right up to my chin, I thought of my two men. Shane and Roscoe. Just thinking about them did wicked things to my body, making my breath quicken and my breasts tighten. I'd never felt urgings like this before today, never felt the stirrings of lust. Never felt heat in my core, the sweet ache of desire spreading throughout my body.

My hand dipped between my legs. I'd never touched myself there before, I'd been taught it was sinful to do so. Good girls didn't bring themselves pleasure. What I was doing was dirty. I knew that, and yet I couldn't stop. I felt positively scandalous as my fingers rubbed where Shane's fingers and mouth had been, reigniting the fire they'd lit there earlier. I bit back my moan as my breath came in short, ragged gasps. Arousal curled up within me, like a wisp of smoke spreading, growing, as my fingers fanned the flames. I remembered the way they'd touched me, how they'd made me feel. Their complete mastery of my body. My fingers rubbed and flicked with wanton abandon, bringing alive the little nub at the top of my mound, delving inside the swollen lips that seeped with my juices.

I wondered what they would do if they caught me touching myself like this. Would they think me naughty? Would Shane spank me as he'd done

earlier? My fingers moved faster as I imagined myself held fast in Shane's strong arms, his heavy hand turning my bottom red, punishing me for touching a place that only they should touch. I was to be theirs, after all. This little spot that was sending sparks of desire shooting through me would belong only to them.

I slid my other hand down to join the first, separating my pussy lips with my fingers so I could rub my swollen nub with a feather-light touch. Sparks so strong they were almost painful, ricocheted through me. I pressed my finger inside me, first to the knuckle then further, as far as it could go, and I wriggled it around, sliding it in and out, muffling my groan with the bedsheets. I imagined it was Shane's finger fucking me like this, his wide digit spreading me open to their gaze. I imagined Roscoe tasting as Shane had done earlier, his short beard scratching my delicate lady parts. I could almost feel his tongue lapping up my juices. What did I taste like? Curious, I brought my finger to my tongue and licked. I screwed up my face, but it wasn't unpleasant, as such. Just… different. Salty. Bitter. Sweet. Sharp. Quite unlike anything else I had ever tasted.

My inexperienced fingers couldn't bring me pleasure as intense as Roscoe and Shane did, and after a while I gave up, frustrated. My body was hot, achy, but I couldn't find any release. I would have to wait for my men. I couldn't wait to discover what else they would do to me. Slowly, I drifted off to sleep, the faces of my soon-to-be-husbands on my mind.

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5

ROSCOE

SHANE and I turned up just in time to see Elise helping Emma cook breakfast. At least, she was trying to help cook, but it looked like she was getting in the way. She certainly didn't look like she'd spent much time in a kitchen. I cast my mind back to yesterday and the contents of Coleton's letter. In it, he'd said he needed a woman who could cook for a team. I'd asked her, specifically, if she could cook. She had said yes. But by the look of things, Elise could barely cook for one, let alone for a whole team. Already, she'd burned the eggs and overcooked the biscuits and as I watched, she broke the pancakes when flipping them and spilt the syrup. She couldn't cook at all!

"I thought you said you could cook?" I tried to keep the annoyance out of my voice, but failed. If there was one thing I couldn't stand, it was liars. Lies and deceit. All they ever gave anyone was a lifetime of misery.

"I can!" she insisted.

At least she had the good sense to look sheepish when I stared at her hard. Color rose to her face.

“Well I can learn!”

In one stride I was upon her and I caught her stubborn chin in my hand. Tears sparkled in her eyes but I steeled myself. I would not marry a liar. I could not. Not after the childhood I’d had, with lies, deceit, cheating and treachery causing no end of problems. Up until yesterday, I didn’t even want a wife at all. I most certainly did not want one who didn’t tell the truth.

“Coleton would be properly disappointed! You were dishonest.”

She opened her mouth to speak but I pressed my finger against her lips. “No,” I told her. “You lied, and here in Bridgewater, lyin’ brides get spanked.”

Without warning, I wrapped my arm around her waist and tossed her over my shoulder like she was a sack of feed and carted her off outside. I wouldn’t spank her in front of Emma; she didn’t deserve that. I would give her a modicum of privacy, at least.

“I’m sorry!” she cried. “I was desperate! And I will learn, I will! Please!”

I put her on her feet but kept a firm grip on her arm. “Yes you will learn,” I assured her “Shane and I will teach you how to cook, and everything else you need to know to please us. But my mother lied and cheated and my parents were miserable. They were always fighting. I will not tolerate dishonesty from my wife. Or my wife-to-be.”

“I’m sorry!” Her eyes pleaded with me, but this was too important to me to let go. She had to learn, once and for all, that she had to be honest. About everything.

“I’m going to spank you,” I told her firmly. “You will learn, and you will learn well, that I will accept nothing less than complete honesty from you. No matter what it is, you tell the truth and we will sort it out together.

If there’s something you can’t do, you say so, and we will teach you. But I don’t want you to ever lie again. About anything. Do you understand me?”

I put a finger under her chin and tilted her face up to look at me. A lone tear trickled down her cheek. But she bravely met my gaze.

“Yes sir,” she whispered.

“Good girl.”

Still holding tightly to her arm, I led her over to the side of the house where a wooden bench sat against the wall. In the afternoons, it would be a good spot to sit in the sun to shell peas. Right now, it would be perfect to perch upon and turn a naughty lady’s bare bottom cherry red.

She lay herself willingly across my thighs, but let out a strangled sob.

“Your tears will not dissuade me,” I growled. “I mean for this to be a lesson you don’t soon forget.”

“I won’t forget, I promise!”

She didn’t move as I lifted up her skirts and petticoats, and parted her drawers, baring her bottom. It was pale and unmarked; the handprints Shane had put there yesterday had faded. That would change in just a moment.

I raised my hand high and brought it down hard, right in the middle of her bottom, my flattened palm large enough to cover most of both cheeks.

Elise stiffened and whimpered, but she didn’t otherwise move, except to cross her legs at the ankles and lift them into the air. I pushed them back down roughly and spanked her again, my hand catching the underside of her bottom, right where she would sit. I intended to leave an ache that would linger and make her journey to town to become our wife a little bit uncomfortable. I wanted her to remember.

Three more whacks quickly followed, all landing in exactly the same place, and she shrieked and kicked, trying to roll off my thighs.

“Hold still,” I commanded, tightening my grip. “This is not finished yet. I will not have you lie to me Elise. Not for any reason.”

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Shane, standing there with his arms crossed, watching the scene with interest. From where he stood, he would have a perfect view of between her legs, her glistening jewels wide open to his gaze. Especially when her feet kicked in protest at the discipline I was dishing out. Her beautiful bottom, rosy now, clenched tight as she dug her fingers into my leg, holding on. She had no need to steady herself; I had no intention of letting her fall. She was mine. Ours. She wasn't going anywhere. She especially wasn't toppling off my lap.

My erection throbbed in my pants, poking into her side every time she squirmed. I, too, could see every drop of moisture gathering on the lips of her delicate folds and I wanted nothing more to plunge my cock deep inside her. But that would have to wait. We would not claim her properly until we were wed.

I raised my hand high again, bringing it down with as much force as I could muster. Elise screamed and broke into sobs, her shoulders shaking. She bent her legs upwards and tried to reach back with her hand to cover her bottom but I caught her wrist. I shook my burning hand, then I helped her to her feet.

"Shane!" she reached for him, but I held her back.

"No," I told her. "I was the one to punish you; I will be the one to comfort you." I turned her and pulled her to sit on my lap, holding her tight against my chest. "It's very important that you understand why you were spanked. Do you?"

"Yes," she ground out between sobs.

"Why?"

"Because I lied to you!" she wailed. "I won't do it again, I promise!"

"I'm very pleased to hear that." I wrapped my arms tighter around her and kissed her hair gently while she cried against my shirt. I must have spanked her a lot harder than Shane had done because she hadn't reacted like this yesterday.

It took her a long time to calm down. When we led her back inside, Emma was serving breakfast.

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6

SHANE

I RODE to town with Elise in her rented buggy. After we returned it, we would go and make Elise our wife. The runaway horse wasn't so flighty with Roscoe riding alongside us. Emma, Kane and Ian, witnesses and guests for our wedding, followed. My thoughts were churning. Elise squirmed on the seat beside me, her bottom still tender from the spanking Roscoe had dished out this morning. He'd been hard on her, but I'd enjoyed watching her bottom redden under his hand. As she'd kicked, I'd gotten several glimpses of the swollen pussy lips that I had sucked on last night. I couldn't wait to claim her, to make her ours properly. Soon, we'd fill both her holes with our cocks. The thought made me smile.

A week ago, hell even a day ago, I hadn't been looking for a wife. I wasn't ready. Not yet. I didn't want to get married until I could provide well for a family. I didn't want my wife and our future children growing up in poverty like I had, living in a poor miner's shack. I still remembered the words my father had spat at me when I left at fifteen years old: *you'll never*

amount to anything. You'll never be more than a copper miner, just like me. Just like my father before me. I hadn't proved him wrong, yet. And I wanted to, before I found a wife. I was close; my blacksmith shop was doing well. I was good at what I did and I enjoyed it. But I wasn't successful enough yet. Not quite. But it was too late. We were headed to the preacher and Elise was going to be ours. Roscoe and I were going to share a beautiful, brave wife. Already, she'd claimed our hearts.

Elise snuggled in closer to me and my cock stirred. I laid my arm across her shoulders, pulling her in tight against me. She rested her hand on my thigh. Her fingers crept out, sneaking up the inside of my leg, heading for my crotch. My breath caught in my throat. What was the little minx doing? Slowly, she walked her fingers closer and closer to the bulge in my pants. I didn't dare breathe. I wanted to take her right then and there. I imagined pulling the horse up, bending her over the side of the buggy and plunging my cock deep inside her softness. Making her scream, just as she'd done last night. Filling her with my seed.

I exhaled loudly. I had to wait.

"How's your bottom?" I whispered, nibbling her ear.

A blush crept over her face. She was so cute with her cheeks as red as her bottom had been. She bit her lip.

"Sore," she whispered back. "Roscoe spanked me hard. Too hard. Why did you let him spank me so hard?" She sounded both petulant and bossy. Roscoe wouldn't have stood for that, but I was more patient than my partner. I didn't scold her as Roscoe would have done. Instead, I tilted her face up so I could kiss her pouting lips.

"I will never interfere in a well-deserved punishment my love," I informed her. "But neither of us will ever hurt you." I kissed her again, just briefly. I wanted to devour her, to lose myself in that hot mouth, but I forced myself to wait. There would be time for that later. We had the rest of our lives.

“Do you promise?”

“To never hurt you? Yes. You will be ours. We will love and protect what is ours, always.”

“That’s good.” Her voice was small, almost frightened. Like she doubted my word. Had she been mistreated? Is that why she’d come west to marry Coleton?

“You’re running from cruelty, aren’t you love?” I spoke softly. My words were for her ears alone. Whatever she told me I would share with Roscoe later, but for now, I wanted her to feel safe enough to open up to me, and keeping my voice low would help with that.

She was silent for a moment, then she shuddered.

“Tell me,” I urged.

Hesitantly, she did. Fury rose within me as she told me about her useless brother gambling away their fortune, running up huge debts, and selling her to Mr. Yates to pay them. The intensity of my anger shocked me. How dare she be married off to someone who would abuse her? Her body shook as she told me about her past and I held her close, kissing her temple tenderly.

“Shhhh now,” I whispered. “You’re ours now. Mine and Roscoe’s. And we won’t let anything bad happen to you. I promise.”

But even as I held her, uneasiness nagged at me. We were a long way from Philadelphia. But it sounded like Elise’s brother was a very desperate man. And desperate men often did desperate things, especially when they had a wealthy backer. I knew why Mr. Yates wanted Elise – she was beautiful. The most beautiful woman I’d ever seen. But now she was ours, and Mr. Yates couldn’t have her. We would make sure of it.

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7

ELISE

ALREADY, Emma was turning out to be a very good friend. She'd helped me get ready for my wedding this morning, helping me dress in the cream satin gown I'd brought with me, and weaving wildflowers into my hair. She had talked while she'd worked, telling me how she met her husbands, and kept me entertained with stories of her family, her children, and life with her men. I was nervous, but she put me right at ease.

"They're good men, Shane and Roscoe," she had assured me. "If you do your very best to please them, they will make you happy. I'm sure of it."

I hoped she was right.

Emma didn't complain about the food I wasted in my feeble attempts to help cook breakfast this morning. Nor did she mention Roscoe carting me off outside and punishing me. I am sure she heard it all: the scolding, the spanking, my cries. Even if she didn't, the tears that wet my eye lashes and my red face would have given it away. Especially when I sat down gingerly on my tender bottom. But Emma didn't say a word. Instead, she was kind.

I couldn’t believe I was riding in a rickety buggy to my wedding day, where I would be wed to not one, but two men. It was like a dream. A very unexpected dream. Ever since I was a little girl, I’d planned my wedding. My whole life, all my schooling, had prepared me to be a high-society wife. I’d gone to finishing school. I’d danced with all the gentlemen at my debutante ball. I’d learned how to manage the household staff, and when Father had died and it had become my responsibility, my training had stood me in good stead. But as John had gambled away the money, the servants had left, one by one, until only Cook remained.

The marriage I was riding to now was very different to the big wedding I had imagined.

My heart pounded as we stood in front of the preacher and Roscoe took my hands. Officially, it was Roscoe I was marrying, because he was the eldest of my two men, but I would belong to both of them. My mouth was dry and my pulse raced as I repeated my vows. I faltered slightly at the ‘honor and obey’ bit. Was I prepared to obey these men for the rest of my life? They’d both already shown me what would happen if I didn’t, and I didn’t much care for it. My bottom still tingled from Roscoe’s harsh wallops this morning. I’d only known these men for one day and already I’d been on the receiving end of two spankings. Both of them had hands as hard as boards.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Emma give me an encouraging smile and I forged ahead with my lines. It was a bit late to back out now, even if I wanted to. Standing next to Roscoe, Shane grinned. My insides flipped. He obviously didn’t care if my words were sincere or not; he’d already proven that he knew how to deal with wayward women. I remembered the way my lady parts had throbbed and how my juices had made my thighs slick in response to the spankings my men had delivered. My mind didn’t like being punished, but my body betrayed me. Even when I had cried afterwards, the

telltale feelings of arousal ripped through me and I felt protected. Safe. Cherished. And those were the things I wanted most of all.

Once the vows were said, Roscoe captured my mouth with his as he slid a simple gold ring onto my finger. Sparks ignited around me as he claimed me with his lips, exploring my mouth with his tongue. I felt his fingers entwine in my hair, pulling my head in closer. He kissed me with so much passion I was dazed, lost in his embrace.

Around us, Emma, Kane, Ian and Shane clapped as Roscoe showed me that I was his. I couldn't wait for Shane to show me I was his, too.

There was no reception afterwards like there would have been had I married in Philadelphia. Instead, Kane and Ian returned my rented buggy and took Emma home, and my new husbands took me straight to the hotel.

"Come on my love," Shane whispered in my ear, bending so close to me I could feel his breath on my neck. "Now it's time for us to show you what it *really* means to be ours."

. "Didn't you already show me?"

Shane chuckled. "That was just a taste."

I sucked in a breath, my heart pounding in anticipation. Aunt Nellie had told me little of the ways between men and women, but she did tell me it would hurt. I walked between them, my hands resting on the crooks of their elbows. I was nervous, but I tried not to let it show. I tried to force Aunt Nellie's words from my mind. Maybe she'd be wrong about the pain, just as she been wrong about the duty.

But the hotel got closer and closer. Just a few more steps along the dusty boardwalk and we'd be there. I had to know. I stopped walking. So did my men.

"What's wrong darling?" Roscoe asked. His tone was gentle and his face was the picture of concern. I felt silly for being afraid. But still, I couldn't shake away Aunt Nellie's warning.

"Will it… will it hurt?"

Roscoe reached up and brushed his thumb gently down my cheek. “It might a little bit,” he said. “Just for a moment. But we’ll be gentle, I promise.”

Butterflies flitted inside of me. My legs shook with nerves as I followed my new husbands into the hotel lobby.

“Don’t worry,” Roscoe whispered, as Shane booked our room. “We will take care of you,” he assured me. “You’re ours now.”

They both held my hands as they led me up the stairs and into our room. Part of me wanted to turn and run. But the other part was excited. If they planned on doing to me anything like what they did to me the previous night, the pain Roscoe warned about, would be worth it.

Shane sat on the edge of the bed and stood me between his knees. Roscoe bolted the door. I licked my lips nervously, trying to wet them, but my mouth was too dry.

Roscoe came up behind me and circled his hands around my waist. “Strip for us, sweetheart,” he whispered in my ear. “I want to see all of you.”

Slowly, I undid the buttons on my dress. But my fingers shook and I fumbled, almost crying with nerves. Shane placed his hands on top of mine. Gently, he captured the tiny buttons in his large fingers and twisted them undone. Roscoe helped him slip the garment off my shoulders. He also took care of my footwear, deftly wielding the buttonhook to undo my favorite black suede boots.

My body jangled with nerves and my hands were trembling so much my fingers were useless, so my men took it upon themselves to unclothe me. It took a long time for my men to rid me of my undergarments: chemise, petticoats, corset, camisole and drawers, and the longer it took the more nervous I became.

“Relax,” Shane commanded softly. “Let yourself enjoy this.”

I took a deep breath in and let it out slowly, doing my best to calm my shattered nerves. My men were careful in their ministrations and leaned forward to kiss my bare skin as it was slowly exposed and I found that I *did* enjoy what they were doing. By the time I stood before them, completely naked, I was both tingling with arousal from their lips, and anxious for what was yet to come.

“Lie back.” Roscoe settled me in the middle of the large bed and straddled me, his thighs on either side of my knees. “Relax.”

I arched my body back into the soft mattress as Roscoe leaned over me and pressed light kisses to my lips, my chin, my throat. He took my breath away as he kissed his way down my body, nuzzling his face between my breasts, his beard softly scratching my skin, tickling me. My skin tingled everywhere his lips touched. I wasn’t nervous anymore. Now, I was just excited.

He cupped my breasts in his hands, squeezing the flesh, twirling my nipple between his thumb and forefinger. The achy hotness beneath his hands deepened and spread, stealing my thoughts, making me focus on nothing but him. He kept kissing, down, down, down, in a line past my navel, to the thatch of light pubic hair at the apex of my thighs.

“Oh!” I squirmed as his mouth set off fireworks inside me.

Beside the bed, Shane discarded his shirt, revealing a muscular torso lightly covered in dark fuzz. The muscles of his shoulders rippled as he bent to unfasten his pants, sliding them down his long, lean legs. His cock stood straight, huge, and my eyes widened. I’d never seen a cock before and it was much bigger than I’d expected. Would it fit inside me?

I watched as he grabbed the thick shaft in his fist and stroked it, running his hand up and down from the base to the tip. I swallowed.

Perhaps sensing my anxiety, Roscoe changed the movement of his fingers, licked faster with his tongue, distracting me from staring at Shane. Instead, all I could focus on was the hot wetness of his mouth and the

wicked things that mouth did to my insides. I spread my legs open, offering my body to him. He accepted my invitation, delving his tongue deep inside me, his fingers playing with my little swollen nub, sending sparks shooting up my spine.

The mattress dipped as Shane climbed onto the bed and when Roscoe moved away, I moaned in protest. I didn't want him to stop! I wanted him to continue fanning the flames of desire that burned within me.

"My turn," Shane informed me as he took Roscoe's place. "Roscoe got to marry you, so I get to take your virginity."

His words were crude, like I was some kind of prize, but as he replaced Roscoe's mouth with his own and trailed his fingers down my abdomen, I decided I didn't care what he said as long as he was as good at stoking my raging fire as Roscoe was.

All my senses were alert, my whole body alive with sparks, as Shane sat up and shifted, his thighs on either side of my hips, and pressed the head of his cock at the entrance to my tight pussy. He moved it up and down over my ready, waiting slit and I rocked beneath him, wanting him. Needing him.

"So wet," he murmured. "Roscoe prepared you well."

With a grunt, he entered me in a single thrust and I cried out at the burning ring of fire as his cock stretched me wide. Once inside me he stilled, hovering above me, letting me get used to the feel of him. The pain was only momentary and as he smiled down at me and I relaxed, my body embraced him and he fitted perfectly. He bent his face to mine, kissed my lips hungrily, and then started moving, in and out, slow, gentle rocks of his pelvis.

I lifted my hands up to his body, wanting to feel him. My fingers explored the hard ridges of his muscles, burrowed into the fur spattered across his chest and squeezed his left nipple. My other hand slid upwards, up his neck, along the small hint of stubble that shadowed his jaw. *Mine.*

This man was mine. The possessive words echoed in my brain as he moved faster, harder, his thrusts growing more urgent, as he claimed me completely.

I reached my hands behind his neck, pulling his face down to me. The fire inside me burnt hotter and hotter, raging out of control as Shane's movements got quicker and deeper. He kissed me, his mouth as hot as my core, and it felt like I was soaring.

Shane lifted his head, shuddered, and stilled, filling me with his hot seed. He stayed like that for a moment, holding himself above me, his eyes closed, his expression one of pure bliss. I could do nothing but lay there and smile at the sensations that washed over me. My whole body tingled and my lady parts spasmed as Shane withdrew from me, leaving me lying there in wonder. *This* was what Aunt Nellie called a *duty*? This was anything but. Aunt Nellie had been wrong twice now. It was clear she had absolutely no idea what she was talking about.

Shane smiled tenderly, proudly, at me. "That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"It was…" I was still breathless from our lovemaking. "It wasn't bad," I confirmed, touching a hand to the spot between my legs that now ached and pulsed, frowning as my hand came away covered in sticky fluid.

"Here." Roscoe handed Shane a cloth and he pressed it between my legs, stemming the flow of him.

"It wasn't bad at all," I said again. "In fact I quite liked it." I felt my face flame with heat as I thought of what we had just done. Was it wrong that I had enjoyed it?

Shane grinned. "That's good. I hoped you would."

"You…. You don't think me a… a loose woman? Immoral?" My voice shook.

"No, my love." Shane shook his head. "We think you're perfect. Don't we Roscoe?" From beside the bed, Roscoe nodded his agreement. "Yes,

sweetheart,” he confirmed, and I released the breath I hadn’t even realized I held. “You’re perfect.”

“Come.” Shane took my hand and led me to the wash stand that stood in the corner. He splashed some water from the jug into the basin, dipped the cloth in and knelt before me, gently wiping away the residue from our lovemaking. He took his time cleaning me up, rinsing the cloth and pressing it against where his cock had been, sending sparks shooting through me all over again. His hands were so gentle when he cleansed me; in striking contrast to how he’d spanked me on the prairie.

The world was still spinning around me, not quite letting me back down to the ground. My pussy still pulsed. And as Shane’s fingers brushed over my swollen nub, I squirmed with desire. More. I wanted more.

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8

ROSCOE

OUR NEW WIFE was no prude that was for certain. She'd quite willingly shed her clothes and hadn't tried to cover herself from our gaze like some women did. And she'd taken Shane eagerly. I'd watched the way her fingers dug into the back of his neck as he'd fucked her possessively. Her wanton display had made my balls ache. I wanted her. The way she'd responded to my touch earlier told me how easy she was to please, and I wanted to teach her there were no limits to the pleasure we could give her.

My cock was rock-hard and straining against my pants, begging to be set free. Looking at her now, with her eyes glazed over, a pretty smile on her face, I knew she would be able to take me. Although it would be hard to resist her sweet charms, I was intending to wait until morning, or later tonight at least, with this being her first time, but it was clear that our comely wife wasn't sated yet. Far from it. By the looks of things, Shane had brought her almost right to the edge. But I wanted to take her flying over the brink.

“Come.” I stretched out my hand. “My turn.”

She turned to me and all I saw was eagerness. There was no hint of hesitation or question in her bold gaze as she licked her lips.

A spark jumped off my skin as she took my hand and stepped towards me, her eyes fixed on mine. There was no doubt that she wanted this.

I patted the end of the bed. “Here, kneel on this.” I helped her get into position just the way I wanted her, with her body resting on her forearms, her knees bent and legs apart on the bed, and her ass high up in the air. Her buttocks were creamy and pale; no trace of the spanking I’d administered that morning remained. I was glad. My intention had been to discipline, not bruise. I didn’t hold with cruelty.

I reached between her legs and ran a finger up her slit, flicking her clit, sliding up and down, testing her eagerness, making her wet for me. She arched her back, pushing her pussy back towards me, opening herself wide up.

Quickly, I undid my pants, pushed them down, stepped out of them, leaving them in a puddle on the floor. My cock was ready, throbbing, standing to attention.

“I’m going to fuck you now,” I growled.

“Yes!”

Her mewl of agreement almost undid me. How did we get so lucky, finding this woman?

Holding the base of my cock, I pressed the tip against her slick entrance, careful not to hurt her in my haste. I wanted her to like being fucked, not fear it. She pushed back against me, begging. I obliged, sinking inside her to the hilt in one steady movement, then I rested just for a moment to let her get used to the feel of me. But waiting wasn’t necessary. The second I grabbed her hips she was moving, rocking her pelvis, trying to take her pleasure all by herself.

I slapped her ass lightly then leaned down over her back and nibbled her shoulder. She wanted aggressive? I could be aggressive. In fact, aggressive was just how I liked it.

Her response was magnificent. She rocked back against me and cried out as my balls slapped against the backs of her thighs with my thrusts. Encouraged, I increased the intensity of our fucking, claiming her hard, thoroughly. I gripped her hips with my fingers, straightening up, leaning back, as I ploughed into her over and over. Her tight pussy clenched around me, her body convulsed and she tilted her head back and yelled out her pleasure.

Damn she was beautiful! A groan escaped my throat as I reached my climax with her, shooting my seed deep inside her. I held her while the waves of pleasure washed over us, taking us together, higher and higher.

The room was silent, our ragged breathing the only sound. I could stay there forever, with my cock snugly embedded inside her warm body. It was bliss.

We lay on the bed, Shane on one side of Elise and me on the other, cuddling her between us, cementing the closeness we had just shared. I felt her relax, listened to her breathing slow and deepen, and watched her eyes flutter closed. I looked across at Shane and he grinned. Our bride was fully sated.

Then Shane’s stomach rumbled, Elise’s eyes snapped open, and she giggled.

“Hungry?” I raised an eyebrow at him. It was time to go and find some lunch.

Together, we got off the bed.

Elise turned her back to Shane so he could lace her corset and while he did, I pulled the pins from her hair, letting the golden locks cascade over her shoulders and spill down her back. I lifted the silky strands in my fingers, watching them sparkle in the sunlight streaming in the window.

“Tighter!” she ordered Shane. But already her voice sounded strained and it was obvious that if he pulled the laces any tighter, making her already tiny waist even tinier, he would cause her discomfort.

“That’s tight enough,” Shane insisted. I was pleased that he thought like me. No wife of ours was going to kill herself by insisting on wearing undergarments that were too tight.

“I want to look good for you,” she said. “Just a bit more. Please?”

“No.” I dropped her hair. “You are ours now, and there’s no need for you to wear a corset so tight.” I placed my hands around her waist, spanning it with my fingers. “See? You’re perfect just like this. No tighter.”

She opened her mouth, about to argue, but I raised an eyebrow at her and she refrained. She wasn’t happy though, I could tell. But I didn’t care about that, I cared about her comfort.

“Have you got one that isn’t boned? It will be easier for you, it will give you more movement and be easier to work in.”

Elise shook her head.

“Talk to Emma,” Shane commanded. “She’s ordering things in from the city all the time. She’s got catalogs. You get yourself whatever you need.” He twirled a rope of her hair around his fingers.

“I don’t want to be indebted to you,” Elise said in a small voice, barely above a whisper.

Indebted? To us? Had she not listened to a word we’d said since we’d found her on the prairie? My palm itched to spank her infuriating backside. She was our wife! Our responsibility!

But I remembered her words to Shane this morning. I had overheard them talking in the buggy when she’d been telling them how her brother had sold her to someone cruel, payment for a gambling debt. I flexed and relaxed my fingers. I would be patient.

I reached up and stroked her cheek, her skin so soft under the edge of my thumb. “You won’t be indebted to us sweetheart,” I assured her softly.

“You aren’t a business arrangement for us – you are our wife. We *want* to provide for you. Everything we have, we will share with you. You are ours.” Tears glistened in her eyes as I held her face in both hands. *Our wife.* The words spun in my head. This beautiful, vulnerable woman was ours. To cherish, love and protect. Forever. I could hardly believe how lucky we were. I wiped the tears from her eyes with my knuckle and kissed her forehead.

“So you do what Shane told you to do and make sure you get everything you need. Get yourself something pretty to wear for us, too. And no more talk about being beholden to us, you hear?”

She nodded, just once, a single nod so slight that if I hadn’t been watching for it, I would have missed it.

“Good girl,” I praised her, happy with her obedience. We would do well together, Shane, Elise and I. So far, in everything she had done, she had been genuine and eager in her willingness to please us. I glanced across at Shane. The expression on his face told me that he was pleased with our accidental bride, too.

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9

ELISE

BOTH MY HUSBANDS were dressed long before I was. All my life, I'd had a maid to help me dress. And even after John had let her go for lack of funds, Cook had always been available to help me if needed. It was a struggle, managing my unmentionables and gown all by myself.

Out the corner of my eye, I watched Roscoe cover his long, muscular legs with heavy canvas pants. It seemed a shame, covering up his perfect body. I'd quite liked seeing him naked. Shane, too. They were both impressive, powerful looking men and just looking at them sent fire to my core and made my senses come alive.

Seeing my struggles as my clothing became more and more entangled, my new husbands stepped forward to help me. In seconds they had the garment smoothed out and righted, both of them smiling with amusement. I felt my face flush with shame. They were laughing at me! At my ineptitude. Tears of embarrassment and fear sprang into my eyes. I couldn't even dress myself! I couldn't cook. I didn't know the first thing about cleaning or

keeping a home. I didn't know how to do anything without servants. How on earth was I going to manage out here? What had I been thinking?

"Hey! What's wrong? Why the tears?" Shane was clutching my shoulders, wiping my cheeks with his thumb. Already, I could tell their voices apart, and their touch.

"Don't you see?" I asked him miserably. "All my life, we had household staff to help me with everything. I can't even dress myself. You know I can't cook. I don't how to clean. I don't know how to do anything that will be required of me out here. I don't know any other life than Philadelphia society. I'm not good enough to be your wife. You need someone better."

Both my husbands' stood in front of me, looking at me sternly, an impenetrable wall of muscle. Although their features were so different, the expressions they wore were the same. Neither of them looked happy. What were they going to do? I knew they wouldn't hurt me, but would they let me stay? Or would they put me on the next train back to Philadelphia?

"What do you think we want our wife to do?" Shane asked me.

I blinked. Was he daft? I looked at him, then at Roscoe, bewildered. Wasn't it obvious what a wife did? They stood silently, waiting for me to answer.

"Well, wifely duties. Cook, clean and wash clothes, of course!"

Shane shook his head.

"Those were Coleton's requirements," Roscoe reminded me.

"You will do all of that, and more, in time. But that's not important right now," Shane said. "Most importantly we want someone willing to satisfy us sexually, and you can do that."

"But I'm… I *was,*" I corrected myself hastily, "a virgin. I don't know how to please men in that way." I felt heat flood my face. A lady did not speak of such matters, did she? But my uncertainty was genuine. I'd never even lain with one man. How was I to satisfy two of them?

“Oh sweetheart,” Roscoe cooed. “You already did. Your willingness is all we need. We can teach you the rest.”

I looked down as shame washed over me. This wasn’t right, it wasn’t proper. I imagined the scandalized expressions on the faces of the other students at Lady Margaret’s School for Girls. The horror! And I giggled. I pressed my hand over my mouth to try to hide it but Shane pulled it away.

“Don’t hide yourself from us love,” he chided gently. “We want to see your laughter.”

“Don’t hide *anything* from us.” Roscoe’s voice was stern but when I looked up at him it was clear he wasn’t mad, just serious. “My parents lied, cheated and fought their entire marriage. I don’t want that. I want your complete honesty, always. Can you do that?” He reached out and touched my cheek and I nodded. “Good girl. I think I showed you this morning how important honesty is to me, yes?”

“Yes,” I breathed, remembering being upended over his dusty thighs, his heavy hand clapping down on my bottom while I cried tears of pain and embarrassment.

“And I want an obedient wife who doesn’t take any unnecessary risks with her safety,” Shane growled. “Two years ago I lost my fiancé, my Rose, in an accident when she was careless and didn’t listen.” His voice was soft again, and I could hear his pain when he spoke. Now the licking he’d given me when they first found me made sense. He’d said something at the time but I wasn’t really listening, then. I was too distraught. Too frightened. In shock. But even then, part of me had known that he was acting out of pain and fear and didn’t really want to hurt me. It was obvious he had loved Rose very much. One day, I wanted him to speak so lovingly about me.

“I can’t go through that again,” he said, shaking his head. “Not now that I’ve given my heart to you. I can’t lose you like that.”

He cupped my chin in his hand, tilted my face up to make me look at him. His dark eyes flashed. “I will spank you again if you are disobedient

and reckless," he told me. "If you endanger your life, I will spank you twice a day for a week if I have to, to make you listen. I will not have my wife endangering herself. Not for any reason."

Sparks shot through my body at his words. They both thrilled and scared me at the same time. I had no doubt he would follow through, and it was a good feeling, knowing that he cared enough to do so. I resolved not to test him. I much preferred him to do other things to me with his skilled hands. I wanted him to make me squeal with pleasure, not in protest.

As we stood there, Shane still holding my chin, the words he'd said started to sink in. *I've given my heart to you*, echoed in my head. He had? Already? A slow smile crept across my face. "So you really do care about me then?" I couldn't help but ask.

"You're ours. Of course I do." Shane squeezed my chin then let me go.

"So do I," Roscoe's deep voice rumbled from behind me.

"How did I get so lucky?" I asked, not quite daring to believe that everything was working out so well. I was afraid that any minute I would wake up, realize this was all a dream, and Mr. Yates was still there, waiting for me.

"You're maybe not as lucky as you think." Roscoe's voice broke into my thoughts. "You will have to work hard. There's a lot of work to be done on our small ranch. I'll teach you, but I'll expect you to be working by my side."

"And I'll want your help down at the smithy sometimes too," Shane added.

"I'm not afraid of hard work," I declared. I didn't think I was, anyway. But I didn't know for sure. I'd never done any hard work in my life! The gentle way I'd been raised in Philadelphia hadn't prepared me at all for a life in the wilds of the Montana Territory. "But you'll have to teach me what to do."

"We'll teach you," Shane confirmed.

“We’ll take great pleasure in teaching you,” Roscoe added. “And we will delight in assisting you in dressing each morning.” He winked. “And in undressing you at night.”

A little thrill went through me.

“But right now we’re going to take our beautiful new bride out to eat.”

My hands flew to my head. My hair! At least that was one thing I knew how to do for myself – pin up my hair. I’d never liked the maids doing my hair. No matter how gentle they said they were, they always managed to pull it until my scalp burned.

“Your hair is lovely as it is,” Shane said.

“No!” I looked at them in horror. “I can’t go out with my hair like this, it isn’t proper! It’s scandalous! I look like a prostitute!”

Shane and Roscoe both chuckled. They reacted the same way so often that I was beginning to wonder if they could read each other’s minds. They took my hands and tugged them away from my hair, tucking my hands under their arms, trapping me between them.

“What will people say?” I tried again, struggling to free my hands, but my husbands’ held me fast.

“You are to please us,” Roscoe said. “It doesn’t matter what people say; you are ours. And we like your hair just the way it is.”

“Roscoe’s right,” Shane said. “You’re beautiful. Leave your hair. I like it.”

“Do you really think I look pretty like this?” I asked shyly, feeling a light flush spread across my cheeks. Happiness danced inside of me. I wanted to please my men, of course I did. But it was hard to go against everything I had been taught. I’d never seen a married woman without her hair pinned up before. “Yes,” Roscoe and Shane both assured me, patting my hands. *Another identical reaction,* I thought. Sometimes, it was almost as if my men were one. Together, we walked out into the bright sunlight of the street and down the wooden boardwalk to the restaurant.

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10

SHANE

AFTER OUR MEAL, Elise walked between us back to the motel and I knew it was time to introduce our new bride to something new. She needed to learn what a Bridgewater marriage *really* meant – how to take two cocks at once. I patted my pocket, checking that the glass plug Ian had given me was still there. In my saddlebag was a small jar of thick oil to help make insertion easier. My cock hardened at the thought of embedding the small plug deep in Elise's ass. It wasn't enough that I had been first to claim her pussy. I wanted to plunder both her holes.

Roscoe bolted the door. I patted the end of the bed. "Come here my love and bend over for me. Your training to please us is about to begin."

She looked at me, confused.

"You have two husbands," I pointed out. "We will both want to fuck you at once. Training will make it easier for you."

Her face paled. I watched as her eyes darted around the room, looking for escape. Her gaze settled on Roscoe, her eyes silently pleading with him

to rescue her.

“It’s not so bad,” Roscoe told her. “Some women say it’s quite enjoyable.”

She swallowed. “What… what are you going to do to me?” Her voice was small, laced with confusion. Did she really not know? What had they taught her at that expensive-sounding finishing school she’d gone to? Certainly nothing that would be useful to her out here.

I fished the plug out of my pocket and held it up for her to see. Her eyes widened and she sucked in a sharp breath.

“You want… to put that… that thing… inside me? Inside my bottom?” she stammered, her voice not much more than a pitiful squeak.

“Yes,” I replied simply.

“No!” she shook her head defiantly and took a step back, straight into Roscoe’s arms. “No! You’re not coming near me with that thing!”

“Yes,” I said again. “If your body gets used to opening up for the plug, it will be much easier for you to take our cocks back there. Otherwise it might be hard for you. Painful.”

“No.” She shook her head again, more vigorously this time. “Absolutely not! I will not have that… that abomination in me! Never!”

“You will,” I insisted. And she would. I had already told her that I wanted an obedient wife. And Roscoe had even less time for argumentative women than I did. Already, I could see him flexing his hands as he held Elise wrapped in one arm. He might have been fooling her, by holding her protectively like that, but I knew he was on my side. Elise was ours. And we meant to have her, in every way that a man could have a woman.

“You will,” Roscoe growled. “If you resist, I will bare your bottom and spank you thoroughly and then you will take the plug anyway.”

Elise gasped and wrenched herself away from Roscoe, running to the window and peering out, down onto the street below. I could see her trembling.

“Please, no!” she begged. “Please, don’t force me.” Tears glistened on her cheeks and I remembered what she’d gone through to end up here. The thought of being made to do something she didn’t want to do obviously terrified her. With a pang, I realized Roscoe and I were wrong to push her so far and I felt sorry for her. This was the woman we had pledged our lives to – promised to love, cherish and protect. She would not be punished for being frightened. Refusing out of fear was not the same thing as disobedience.

It wasn’t often that I went against Roscoe, but I knew I had to now. It was the right thing to do. I turned to him and shook my head. Then I strode across the room and joined her at the window, resting my hand on her shoulder.

“No.” I spoke softly, gently. “You won’t be forced. Nor will you be punished.” Elise sighed with relief. I risked a glance across at Roscoe and he glared at me, but after witnessing Elise’s relief that she would not be forced, I knew I was doing the right thing in standing up to him. He was the one who taught me to stand up for what was right, after all.

I looked away from him quickly and continued speaking. “But you will be plugged,” I said. Her face still to the window, Elise sucked in a breath. “I will be gentle, I promise. And once it’s in, you will be rewarded. You already know how good a tongue feels on your clit.” To remind her, I slid my other hand down between her legs. The thick layers of petticoats barred my way, but my meaning was clear. Roscoe and I could make her squeal in pleasure as we had our wicked way with her and she knew it. Beneath my hands, her body trembled. I heard her breathe again. Absently, I twirled a lock of her hair around my finger, waiting for her to respond. And she would respond, I knew it. She had been trying so hard to please us and she would here, too. She just needed a little time to get used to the idea of having her bottom filled and plugged.

“Wait.” Elise turned away from the window and spun to face me. She looked over at Roscoe then looked at me. “You told me you wouldn’t interfere in a punishment, but you just did. Why? I don’t understand.” Uncertainty crossed her face and she held her body rigid, like she was afraid she would get in trouble for speaking out of turn. Mr. Yates must have been truly cruel to frighten her so terribly.

“I said I wouldn’t interfere in a well-deserved punishment,” I corrected her, emphasizing the words she had left out. “That’s different to stepping in to stop unjust treatment. Disobedience is punished, but fear isn’t. Roscoe missed your signs of fear and thought you were simply being disobedient.”

“That’s true sweetheart.” Roscoe stepped forward. “My mother was a cantankerous woman, always contrary and arguing when she wasn’t lying and cheating. I don’t want a wife who argues every point and I won’t allow it. But Shane is right – if you are genuinely afraid and need more time, you can say so. You won’t be punished for that.”

Elise nodded. I watched her square her shoulders, steel herself, and I smiled proudly. Our accidental bride was not short on courage, and that was a very necessary trait out here.

“I think I’m ready,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper. “But will you… will you be gentle with me?”

“We will always be gentle with you, my love,” I assured her, pleased when her stiff body visibly relaxed. “We don’t ever wish to hurt you. You are ours, and we cherish what’s ours.”

I took her hand and led her back to the bed, guiding her gently over it. Roscoe lifted up her skirts and parted her drawers, baring her to our gaze while I retrieved the jar of oil from my saddlebag in the corner. Just as I’d promised Elise, Roscoe was gentle with her as he smoothed her skirts up over her back and sat on the bed next to her, holding her hands out in front of her to help steady her.

I smeared the thick oil liberally over the plug and parted her buttocks with my fingers, holding the head of the plug against her puckered hole. She stiffened, trying to clench her cheeks together.

“Relax,” I commanded, holding her bottom apart. “Fighting it will only make it hurt.” Roscoe transferred both her wrists to one of his hands and smoothed her hair with his other hand, soothing her.

Slowly, I worked the plug inside her, pressing and twisting it, forcing it past the tight barrier of her body. She whimpered as the plug breached her entrance and I held it still, letting her get used to it. I watched her body tighten and her hands tug against Roscoe’s grip as she held her breath.

“Push against it. It will make it easier.”

It slid in easily after that and I pushed it right in, watching her anus swallow the bulb, closing around it, leaving the flared base outside her body. Damn but she was beautiful! Her pussy, red and swollen from being fucked, winked from between her legs and the base of the plug glinted in the sun’s rays right in the center of her shapely bottom. It seemed a shame to cover her perfect bottom with clothes. I parted her drawers wider, wanting a better view. I nodded at Roscoe. It didn’t seem fair that he hadn’t seen our bride with her plug in, yet.

“Stay right there sweetheart,” Roscoe told her, and he scrambled to his feet. He took his place beside me. Together, we ran our hands over her bottom, reaching under her drawers, rubbing her softly, sliding one finger up between her legs, grinning as she arched back into us.

“You are the most beautiful bride in all of the Montana Territory,” Roscoe declared. “Plugged like this, for us, you are perfect.”

Even though Elise couldn’t see it, I nodded in agreement. Roscoe was right. We might not have been looking for a wife when we came across Elise in distress. But now that we’d found her, we wouldn’t be letting her go for anything.

“You might as well take your clothes off,” I said softly, standing up. “You won’t be going anywhere for a while. You’ll need time to get used to the plug before you start wearing it around.”

Her body stiffened and she turned around to look at me. “I’ll be wearing this again? Wearing it around?” She sprang to her feet, righting her clothing with quick, fierce movements. A deep blush spread across her face and she avoided my gaze.

“Yes sweetheart,” Roscoe answered.

“Your bottom hole will often be filled,” I told her. “If not with your plug, with our cocks.”

She looked up, her eyes wide with fear. “All the time?”

“No.” I shook my head. “Not all the time.”

“For an hour or so every day,” Roscoe said. “So we can fuck you there whenever we want without risk of hurting you.”

“But you don’t need to worry,” I assured her. I seemed to be telling her that a lot. The men she was running from were obviously brutal. Briefly, I wondered how long it would take for us to trust that we were men of our word. We had promised never to hurt her, and we wouldn’t. Ultimately, the plug was for her pleasure as well as ours. We were not selfish men. We would make sure she was just as satisfied as we were.

“We’ll take it slow,” Roscoe said. “We’re not going to hurt you.”

“I promised you a reward,” I reminded her. “You will always be rewarded when you wear your plug for us.”

As quickly as we could, Roscoe and I stripped her of her clothing and laid her gently back on the bed. We didn’t undress her slowly like we did before, taking our time to marvel at her body and kiss her naked skin, but instead we tore it from her eagerly, being careful not to tear her garments in our haste. As soon as we had her stretched out on the bed, her arms went immediately to her breasts, covering herself.

“No.” I pushed them away. “Hands by your sides. We want to see all of you.” She blushed, but obeyed. It seemed our new bride was always blushing. As soon as one faded, a new flush of color spread across her cheeks. I liked it. We would have to keep her that way.

Roscoe and I joined her on the bed. I lay on one side of her, Roscoe on the other. Elise was silent, but her body trembled slightly between us.

“Close your eyes,” I whispered. She obeyed. She lay awkwardly with her hips lifted slightly off the bed, perhaps from the discomfort of the plug in her bottom so I slid my hand down her side, down her thigh, and traced small circles on the side of her leg, slowly moving ever upward, to that delicious spot between her thighs that already glistened with her juices. At the same time, Roscoe bent over her, his mouth over her breast, sucking her nipple into her mouth. Her body arched up; it was clear what she wanted.

I slid my hand over her pussy, cupping her mound with my palm, my middle finger reaching down behind her, underneath her, to tap the base of the plug she wore. She let out a low moan, deep in her throat.

While Roscoe concentrated on her breasts and neck, I lowered my mouth to that sweet spot between her legs and kissed her clit, flicking it lightly with my tongue. I dipped two fingers inside her, feeling her wetness, making her squirm.

Her body was alive under our hands, it was as though sparks danced across her skin. Her nerves quivered and trembled. Her breathing was ragged. She couldn’t speak, she could only whimper. She kept her eyes obediently closed, but I could tell it was a struggle. It was obvious she desperately wanted to open them, to see what we were doing, but I wanted them shut for a reason: so she would have to feel us, and not be distracted by watching us.

I flicked her clit with my tongue again and a powerful orgasm ripped through her, raising her hips up off the bed, causing her arms to thrash against us and her legs bend. Her whole body trembled.

It was a long time before she was able to speak, several minutes at least, and when she did, her voice was hoarse, breathless.

“Was that my reward?”

Roscoe chuckled. “Yes. Was it worth it?”

“Hmmm.” She pretended to think for a moment, her eyes sparkling with laughter. She would keep us on our toes, this woman, and I liked it. I liked her sass. I liked her spirit.

“Well?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Yes,” she said slowly, smiling at each of us in turn. “Yes, I think it was. I think I’ll let you put that… that *thing* in me again, if you promise to do that each time.”

“Of course, my love. Your pleasure is our command.” I bent my face to hers and kissed her deeply, letting her taste her salty muskiness on my lips. When I pulled away, Roscoe was right there, waiting to take my place.

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11

ROSCOE

I COULDN'T WAIT to get back to Bridgewater. I'd liked our wedding right enough, and I'd particularly enjoyed getting to know our new bride, but now it was time that we took her home. I needed to check on my crops. They would be ready to harvest soon and there was plenty of work to be done before then.

My crops were healthy; the harvest would be good. And it would bring in plenty of money. Money I'd earned myself, with my own honest toil. It was a good feeling, earning an honest living. I couldn't abide liars, cheats and swindlers. I would rather starve than follow my parents down their chosen dishonest path.

But would it be enough for Elise? I hoped it would, but I wasn't sure. I knew little of her life in Philadelphia, but I knew she had grown up in a home that wanted for nothing. I knew she expected to marry a man who could continue to keep her in the manner to which she was accustomed – that was why she had gone to that elegant school. Shane and I couldn't

provide that. Oh, we could provide for her well enough, but there would be no mansions or servants on our little ranch and life would be far different. Would we be enough for her? Would our modest income be enough for her? Or would she want more, more, always more, just like my mother did? I didn't know.

Elise stirred in my arms. I had intended for her to ride double with me, sitting behind my saddle, but her voluminous gown proved that to be impossible, so I held her on my lap instead. She sat sideways on me, with her arms around my neck, and I held her tight, keeping my horse at a steady walk. I was afraid a bouncy trot would send her toppling off and I feared she would squeal in terror at a lope. It would take near half the day to get home at this rate, but we couldn't take any risks with our new wife.

My cock throbbed as her bottom rubbed against me, her body swaying with the movement of my horse. I couldn't wait to get her home so I could plunge deep inside of her and take my fill. Shane could wait, this time. It was my turn to be first.

I was lost in thought as we approached Bridgewater but I looked up at Shane's yell.

"What is that?" Elise asked, twisting in my arms to get a better look at the orange glow in the distance, a curlicue of smoke rising from it.

"Fire," I told her. I tried to keep the panic out of my voice but instinctively I clutched her tighter, kicked my horse into a smooth gallop. We had to get home.

"That's my blacksmith shop!" Shane shouted, fury and fear tinging his tone. He spurred his horse on, racing desperately for home, with Elise and I hot on his heels.

My bride's arms tightened around my neck and I held the reins in one hand, keeping Elise close to my body with the other. At any other time I would have enjoyed having this beautiful woman wrapped around me so tightly but right now I had other things on my mind. *Fire!* If it wasn't gotten

under control soon it would threaten the whole of Bridgewater. Our ranches, our livelihoods, our families.

Elise clung to me, clearly terrified at the speed at which we were galloping, but I couldn't slow down. She'd just have to hang on.

My mind raced. Elise needed to be safe while we fought the fire. The Bridgewater men would all come and help no doubt, but the womenfolk would stay out of the way and mind the children. Elise needed to be with them. Our small ranch was closest to the smithy; she may not be safe in our cabin. But I didn't have time to waste, taking her somewhere. She would just have to run to Emma's. I wouldn't even have time to unsaddle my horse.

Men were running towards the fire as we approached Bridgewater and Shane was nowhere to be seen. I reined my horse up outside our cabin, hopefully far enough from the fire to be safe, but he tossed his head and snorted in fear. I would have to stable him. He would run away otherwise. I lowered Elise to the ground and leaped down myself.

"Run to Emma's!" I told her. "Go!" She turned away. "Wait!" I took her face in my hands, held steady in my palms, and looked deeply into her eyes. I pressed my mouth to her lips in a passionate kiss, trying to show her that already, I loved her.

She wrapped her arms around me and kissed me back just as passionately and I smiled. *She knew.*

"Now go!" I cried. "But stay safe! Help Emma with the children and stay out of the way of the fire! We'll be back to get you when it's safe. Run!"

I watched her for just a second as she turned and fled, but I couldn't watch her for long. I had to quickly sort out my horse, then I had to help the men.

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ELISE

I RAN towards Emma's house as fast as I could, holding up my skirts so I wouldn't trip. My heart pounded in fear. Roscoe hadn't let me get close enough to the fire to see, but it looked to be well engulfed. Smoke muddied the air, making me cough. I kept running.

Just up ahead I could see children, women, all milling around. Was that Emma I could see, shepherding children inside, or was it someone else? A bonnet obscured her face and I couldn't tell. I was about to call out to her when I was tackled from behind and I went flying, landing heavily, rolling. Something, or someone, was holding my arms, pinning me down. I struggled to get away but they were too strong for me.

"Mr. Yates is waiting for you," a deep voice that I didn't recognize, rasped. Before I could tell him that he was too late, that I was already married, he pressed the muzzle of a gun against the side of my head. I froze, terrified, but he didn't pull the trigger. Instead, he spoke quietly, evil words that filled me with dread. "You're just going to have a little sleep," he said.

He rolled me over to face the sky and held a cloth to my face, pressing down on my nose and mouth. An unfamiliar sweet smell filled my nostrils. I panicked, fighting with everything I had, but he was too strong and still, he kept the cloth pressed to my face.

Help! I screamed in my mind but I knew no one could hear me. It was unlikely anyone would see me either, with a barn between us and the fire, and our cabin blocking the view to Emma's house. This criminal had chosen his spot well. My fights grew weaker and weaker and finally, everything went black.

I'm not sure how long I was asleep for, but when I came to I was facedown over the back of a horse. My body rocked in time with the plodding of the horse. My captor wasn't in any rush, which made me suspect we had left Bridgewater far behind. I squinted, my vision blurred, trying to make out where I was but I couldn't move for my wrists and legs were tied and I was afraid to lift my head too far for fear my captor would see I was now awake. I didn't know what he would do to me so I stayed quiet and as still as I could while I tried to gather my wits. I didn't recognize the little I could see of the surrounding landscape but then I wouldn't; I'd only been in the Montana Territory for such a short time.

My brain was foggy and my mouth was dry but I didn't dare ask for a sip of water to quench my thirst. It was much better to feign sleep, until I knew what kind of a man I was dealing with. No man who would kidnap a woman was likely to be kind, I knew that much. *Mr. Yates is waiting for you* echoed in my head, in time to the beat of the hooves beneath me, and the words filled me with fear. I'd thought I would be safe, this far from Philadelphia. I had no idea that he would want me bad enough to track me clear across the country. How on earth had he found me? I had left no trace…

Panic welled up within me but I pushed it away. It would do no good to give in to terror now – I had to keep my head. I had to think! How was I

going to get out of this mess? I had no idea. I forced myself to breathe normally, in and out. In and out. Over and over, nice and slow. The dust kicked up from the hooves beneath me assailed my nostrils and threatened to make me cough but I closed my eyes and swallowed lots, forcing it away. I knew my captor wouldn't kill me – I was no good to Mr. Yates if I was dead – and I hung onto that thought as each stride of the horse took me further and further away from Bridgewater and the men I had fallen in love with so quickly.

I let my thoughts drift to Shane and Roscoe. My husbands. Tall, dark and handsome, both of them. I thought of the chiseled lines of Shane's jaw, the scratchy beard softening the hard planes of Roscoe's face. I saw myself reflected in their dark eyes when they cuddled me close, remembered the feel of their strong arms around me as they held me tight. I pictured their bodies, long, lean and well-muscled. The way their cocks sprang out at my touch from where they were nestled in their bed of dark, curly hair. I thought of how huge their hands were. How their spread-out fingers covered most of my bottom when they spanked me, how their hands felt as hard as a board. But oh how different their hands were when they didn't use them to punish, but to give pleasure, instead! They were skilled at making all my senses come alive, at making my nerve endings tremble and dance. At turning my core into molten lava. They were so alike I almost thought of them as one, yet they were so different as well. Already, they had made me feel like I was the most important woman in all the world.

How many hours had passed since I'd been taken? I didn't know. Did they have the fire under control yet? Had they noticed I was missing? Were they searching for me? So many questions that I didn't have the answers to, and I wouldn't have the answers. All I could do was wait. And hope.

I hadn't yet seen Shane's smithy but I knew he was proud of it, of what he had achieved there. Pride was evident in his voice when he spoke of it, and the panic in his yell when he'd realized it was on fire, haunted me.

I imagined all the Bridgewater men making a human chain, passing along bucket after bucket of water, in a desperate attempt to extinguish the flames. How did they even fight fires out here? Did they have a water cart and steam pump like they had in Philadelphia? I didn't know. I hadn't been in the Montana Territory long enough to know about anything at all. I just hoped they were safe. I hoped I would see them again. I hoped they would find me…

My eyes closed of their own accord and the rhythmic rocking of the horse soon lulled me back to sleep.

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SHANE

IT WAS NO GOOD – the fire was too big. All I could do was stand and watch helplessly as my blacksmith shop, the business I had worked tirelessly in for years, making it the best smithy around, was consumed by flames. I heard my father's voice in my head. He'd said the same words to me so many times I knew them by heart. *Don't go getting above your station, boy. You'll never be anything more than me. A poor copper miner, living in a rough shack. That's all you'll ever be.* I'd been bound and determined to prove my father wrong. I *wasn't* going to be a copper miner, spending my days below ground, never seeing the sun. Having just enough money to get by and sometimes not even that. Drowning my sorrows in moonshine every night. I wanted better than that. And I had it. Well I *did* have it once, I corrected myself. But I probably didn't have it anymore. My livelihood was burning to the ground in front of my very eyes. We'd fought valiantly to save it; all the Bridgewater men had. We'd been fighting for what seemed like hours. And it wasn't enough.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, there was the long, low rumble of thunder and the heavens opened, spewing down hail in a violent storm.

All around me, men cheered. They whistled, yelled and clapped. We were saved! Someone took my arm from behind and danced me around in a merry jig, a crazy celebration of a sudden spring hailstorm.

The hail was painful as it pelted us, little blocks of ice hitting our skin in a stinging kiss but I didn't care. The hail was our savior! I watched, mesmerized, as the hail slowly extinguished the flames, leaving behind the smoldering ruins of what had once been my dream.

The hail storm was over as suddenly as it had begun and we stood around, triumphant. My smithy was mostly gone, but Bridgewater was safe. No lives had been lost. Tomorrow, when the ashes were cool, I would sift through the rubble and salvage what I could. My anvil, my forge, my tools. I would start again. I would have to – I had a wife now.

I looked around for Roscoe as the men slowly dispersed, back home to their own families now that the danger was over. When I was ready, they would help me rebuild but for now, they had done all they could do. Now I wanted to get back to Elise.

I found him at the edge of his corn field. The hail had been my fortune, but it was Roscoe's tragedy. His crop was ruined. The corn was battered and bent, the harvest would be ruined.

He shook his head sadly as I approached. "All that work, gone. Elise will hate me now, just like my mother did my father. I won't be good enough for her, not now that I have nothing to offer her."

Anger flooded me. Elise was nothing like his parents! "Why don't you let Elise be the judge of that?" I snapped at him, clenching my fists by my sides. I wanted to hit him, I was so mad. "None of this was your fault. Elise will know that."

"Will she?"

“Yes.” I wanted to shake some sense into him, but I was afraid. I’d never seen Roscoe this despondent before, and I’d known him most of my life. What was wrong? Was he truly scared she would reject him?

“I’ll have to find her,” he mumbled, his voice low. “Tell her I’ve failed.”

“You haven’t failed!” I argued, but he didn’t respond. Just turned and walked away.

We hadn’t gone more than a few steps when Emma came running up, her face red from exertion, her features distorted in panic. Something was wrong. I broke into a run. Beside me, Roscoe did the same.

“Someone took Elise!” Emma yelled, as soon as she was close enough to be heard.

“What?” I asked in disbelief.

“Someone took Elise,” Emma repeated, panting for breath. “A man.”

“When?” Roscoe asked.

Emma looked down at the ground. “A long time ago,” she admitted. “When you first got here. The children saw it but didn’t think to say anything and I was too busy to notice she wasn’t there…. I’m sorry!”

“Which way did he take her?”

“I don’t know. I’m sorry.”

I didn’t have time for her apologies. I pushed past her roughly, sprinting for my horse. We had to find her! The ruins of my blacksmith shop… Roscoe’s battered crop… none of it mattered any more. Our beautiful bride was gone!

Who had taken her? Why? Where was she? The questions flew around in my brain, tormenting me and I didn’t have the answers.

“There!” Roscoe yelled and I looked at where he pointed. There on the ground, not far from us, were obvious signs of a struggle. Is this where he had grabbed her? He better not have hurt her! A fury stronger than I’d ever felt before, raced through me, searing me with a hatred so intense it scared me. I clenched my fists as tension filled my body. Once I got my hands on

the man who had taken our beautiful bride, his life wasn't going to be worth living.

"You get the horses," Roscoe ordered, taking charge as always. He'd always been good in a crisis: level-headed, calm, collected. Able to think clearly. He pointed to the ground where the hoof prints of two horses were clearly visible. "I'll get the guns. We'll follow the tracks. Come on!"

I ran for the horses.

By the time Roscoe returned with the rifle, ammunition and a pistol each, I had caught the horses, strapped on their bridles, and was starting on the saddles.

I strapped on the gun belt Roscoe threw me. He'd filled it with bullets already. He slid the rifle into the scabbard on his saddle then went to the well to fill the canteens. We didn't have time to gather any food, but as long as we had water we would be okay. We didn't have time to waste; we'd have to ride hard.

I'd never been as frantic in my life as I was now. I leaped into the saddle and kicked my horse into a gallop before I was even fully seated, leaning low over his withers, spurring him on.

It was easy enough to follow the hoof prints, even at full gallop; whoever had taken Elise clearly hadn't bothered to try to cover his tracks. Had he been that confident he wouldn't be followed? Now that we had left Bridgewater far behind, it didn't look like he was going very fast, either. Neither Roscoe nor I were very good at tracking, but we both knew enough to know that the prints we were following hadn't been left by a hurrying horse. After an initial burst of speed when Elise had first been taken, they were now walking along sedately, as though they had all the time in the world. Which was good for us, I told myself. That would give us a bit of time to catch them up.

Neither of us spoke, we just rode, as fast as our steeds could carry us. Every mile we galloped from Bridgewater was one mile closer to our bride,

but how many miles did we have yet to go? It was impossible to tell. I tried to do a quick calculation in my head… how long did it take a horse to walk a mile, and how many hours had she been gone? But my brain was too numb to figure it out. Too much had happened and I couldn't think clearly. All I could do was ride. We had to find her!

Our horses started to labor so we eased back to a steady lope to rest them a bit but still, we were silent. The only sound the rasping of our mounts breath, the steady drum of their hooves on the dusty ground.

If we found Elise… *when* we found her, I corrected myself hastily, what was she going to think when we told her that the men she was married to now had nothing? That we would both have to rebuild, virtually from scratch? Would she still want us?

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ELISE

WHEN I WOKE up again much later, the sun was high in the sky and I couldn't move. My shoulders burned from my arms being pulled so tight behind me, my wrists tied together behind the thick tree truck. The rough bark jammed against my back, scratching me. The uneven ground was hard beneath my bottom and thighs, littered with sticks and stones that poked into me. The tree shaded me for now, but I knew that soon, the sun would move and the full force of its scorching rays would beat down on me.

I licked my dry lips, my tongue as parched as the dry grass around me. There was a strange taste in my mouth. The bitterness that lingered from the ether mixed with trail dust, I thought. A canteen sat just out of reach, leaning against a saddle, torturing me, for even if I could grab it in my feet and bring it to me, I couldn't drink from it with my hands tied behind the tree. I tugged against my binds but they held fast, the rope digging into my wrists when I pulled. I winced at the burning pain. Two hobbled horses grazed a few feet away. My captor was nowhere to be seen.

I slumped back against the tree as unconsciousness claimed me again just briefly, but I fought against the darkness threatening to overwhelm me. I had to think! I had to get away! Nothing in my genteel upbringing had prepared me for having to escape from a kidnapper, and a sense of hopeless doom filled me. I wasn't gagged. Was that because we were so far away from Bridgewater that my captor was confident we wouldn't be caught? And so far away from any form of civilization that he knew I would not be heard if I screamed? Or was it simply an oversight on his part? That last thought gave me hope. If my kidnapper was incompetent, it meant I might be able to escape. I tugged at the rope binding my wrists again, but it held fast. I stretched my fingers as far as they could go, hoping against hope that I would be able to reach the knots, but the rope was too tight for me to get any leverage. My hopes quickly drained away as pain shot up my arms from the pressure of the rope and the unnatural strain on my shoulders. This wasn't going to work. I would have to think of something else.

"Ah! You're awake." My captors' voice startled me out of my planning and I looked up to face him. An ugly scar ran the length of his left cheek and a hat shaded his face. He wore two guns, one low on each hip, and what looked to be a knife tucked into his boot. He was big – taller and broader than Shane and Roscoe, and he towered over me, casting a shadow over my legs and feet.

"Water," I croaked, dust clogging my throat, making me cough. He bent down, picked up the canteen, squatted in front of me, held the rim of the bottle to my chapped lips. The sweet, cold liquid trickled down my throat, making me feel alive again. So he was a gentleman kidnapper, then. He wasn't going to let me die of thirst.

He stood up to his full height and smiled down at me showing missing, tobacco-stained teeth. It wasn't a nice smile. There was no kindness or reassurance in his eyes. Instead, there was evil. Glee. A sick kind of triumph. He had me right where he wanted me – completely at his mercy. I

bit back my fear. There had to be a way out of this situation, I just had to find it.

I remembered the gold coins I had secreted away in the lining of my skirt. The skirt that had been left behind in Bridgewater, in what was to be my new home. With my new husbands. Maybe I could buy my freedom?

“I have money,” I tried. “Gold eagles. Four of them. All yours, if you let me go.” I fought to keep my voice even, without a trace of fear. I was afraid; terribly so. But I couldn’t let him know that. He had to think I had my wits all about me. I was used to men like him – Mr. Yates, and even John to a lesser degree, were like him. They thrived on the fear of those smaller and weaker than themselves. Good men, men like my husbands, were protectors. But the man standing in front of me, just like John and Mr. Yates, was not a good man. And he would enjoy seeing me panicking, afraid. I was not going to give him that satisfaction.

“Ha!” he scoffed, sneering at me. “Your brother and Mr. Yates will pay me handsomely – far more than any paltry sum you can offer.”

His boots were far too close to me and I shrank back in fear, but there was no escape – the tree trunk dug into my back. If he was going to kick me, there was nothing I could do to stop him. He stood there, just staring down at me, not saying a word.

I gathered my courage. “Shane and Roscoe will find me.”

There was that evil grin again, but wider this time, the grin of someone who knows he holds all the cards, and he can play it out however he wants to.

“No they won’t,” he told me, shaking his head as if he didn’t have a care in the world. “They’ll be fighting the fire for the whole day. It was well and truly ablaze, threatening the whole town. I made sure of it.”

He looked so proud of himself and something inside of me snapped.

“You disgusting bastard!” I yelled, fighting against my restraints. I’d never uttered such a word in my life and it felt so wrong to say it now, but

so right at the same time. Satisfying.

He just nodded and puffed out his chest, pleased with himself. His stance sickened me. What kind of monster was he? Even Mr. Yates wouldn't be so cruel as to endanger innocent people, would he?

"I got rid of Coleton and delayed those two. Now I will take you back to Philadelphia where you belong, to take your rightful place as Roger's wife."

I gasped. The color drained from my face. I felt sick. *He killed Coleton?*

"Mr. Mallone died of a… uh… nasty accident," my captor told me, touching the toe of my boot with his foot. I pulled my legs back, bent my knees, brought my heels as close to my bottom as I could. The tree trunk scraped against my back as I moved, rubbing me raw.

"How?" I whimpered, confused. How did he find Mr. Mallone? I'd been so careful. Mrs. Whittaker had been watching too, and we'd been sure I hadn't been seen.

"How did I kill him?"

"No!" I shook my head frantically. No, I didn't need to hear those details. It was bad enough that I knew the poor man was dead. I did not want to know how he met his sad demise. Especially not when I felt somewhat responsible for his death. If I'd stayed in Philadelphia where I belonged, Mr. Mallone would still be alive.

"How did I find him?" my captor guessed again.

"Yes," I ground out through gritted teeth.

"Oh it was easy," he declared, taking a small step back. "It's amazing what someone will tell you when they have a knife at their throat."

"You held Mrs. Whittaker up at knife point?" My voice was barely above a whisper. I was so horrified I could hardly form the words. What a despicable man! My hatred for this man, and for my brother and Mr. Yates, grew deeper with every second that passed.

"No, no, not me." He shook his head. "I live here in Montana. Mr. Yates did, and sent me instructions."

Somehow, knowing that the man standing in front of me hadn't been the one to threaten Mrs. Whittaker made me feel slightly better. But knowing that Mr. Yates had been the one to do it, scared me even more. Was there nothing the man would stop at to get his way?

"You'll have to make it up to him when you get home," my kidnapper told me almost gleefully. "The whole town knows you left him, you realize. He was quite upset. He's a very proud man, as I'm sure you know, and he doesn't take well to being crossed. John promised you to him, and he means to have you."

From the little I knew of Mr. Yates he didn't take well to anything, but I held my tongue. It would do no good to bring up his reputation now.

I closed my eyes for a moment, trying to make sense of everything. It seemed Mr. Yates' cruelty knew no bounds. I struggled to understand why he wanted me so badly he would order the death of a man he didn't know, just to prevent my marriage, stop my escape. If he was willing to go to such lengths, what would he do to me when he discovered he'd lost; I was already married?

"But why?" None of this made sense. "Why does he want me so badly? There are plenty of other women who would marry him, with all his money. Why me?"

The despicable man at my feet looked me up at down, perhaps deciding how much to tell me. He shrugged carelessly. "You're pretty," he said, as if that explained everything. But it didn't.

"So are other women," I pointed out.

"Your brother owes Mr. Yates a lot of money. You're payment for that debt and Mr. Yates means to collect."

I stared at him, aghast. "So he would order the killing of an innocent man?"

My captor didn't reply.

"Why does he not just shoot John? Even things up?"

“Your brother is worthless. It’s you he wants.”

“How is he going to get any money out of me?” My head was spinning. None of this made any sense. My brain was fuzzy and I knew I wasn’t thinking clearly but thinking straight or not, I didn’t understand why Mr. Yates wanted me so badly. Surely this wasn’t just about his damn foolish pride? Would he really go to such great lengths just to prove to the world that he got whatever he wanted? The people of Philadelphia already knew that. Hunting me down and forcing me back to Philadelphia wasn’t going to change anything for him. “I don’t understand,” I mumbled.

There was a chuckle above me, like the answer was really obvious and he couldn’t believe how stupid I was that I couldn’t figure it out.

“Oh I do believe he will get his money’s worth out of you,” he told me, licking his lips lasciviously.

Bile rose up in my throat and I felt sick to my stomach, like I wanted to vomit. Now I understood. Mr. Yates wanted me in the same way my husbands had claimed me. Except I had willingly given myself to my husbands, I’d enjoyed their attentions, delighted in the feel of their fingers, mouths, and cocks doing delicious things to me. I would not give myself to Mr. Yates. Not ever. But as I looked up at the man shadowing me, I knew that it would not matter whether or not I consented. Mr. Yates would do with me as he wished and there wouldn’t be anything I would be able to do about it. Everybody knew a wife was to do her duty. Except that I wouldn’t be his wife.

I looked up at my captor, squinting my eyes against the bright sunlight.

“How much is Mr. Yates paying you?” I asked.

“Five hundred dollars” he told me proudly. “To be delivered the day you become Mrs. Roger Yates.” He folded his arms across his chest and looked down at me arrogantly, as though he was already a rich man. What was he going to say when he found out all his efforts had been in vain?

“You’re too late,” I told him. “I’m already married.”

He looked at me in horror for a fleeting second then, with a roar, he rushed at me. I shriveled back against the tree, desperate to protect myself, needing to get away. But there was nowhere to go. I was held fast. He raised his hand above my head then slapped my cheek. My head slammed back against the trunk of the tree. Stars swam in my eyes. Then I saw nothing but blackness.

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15

ROSCOE

I REINED MY HORSE UP, signaling to Shane to stop. I held a finger to my lips, telling him to be silent, and pointed. I could see something just up ahead but I couldn't make out yet what it was. There were two horses, hobbled, grazing some distance apart from each other, heads down eating without a care in the world. I froze. We were completely out in the open with no cover at all. So far, the horses hadn't raised the alarm but that would happen soon enough. Behind them stood a solitary tree. A makeshift camp had been erected nearby, smoke curled from a fire. Someone squatted by it. We edged closer.

The person by the fire stood up. Even from this distance, it was clear he was big. Tall. Solid. And then I saw her – Elise. Sitting against the tree, slumped sideways, looking for all the world like she was just having a rest. Was she hurt? Was she tied up? Relief and anger fought for dominance inside me.

I nodded to Shane but he could see her too. Anger darkened his features and his body stiffened. I watched as he pulled one of the Colts from its holster and cocked it, resting it against his leg. Slowly, I eased the rifle from the scabbard and held it across the front of my saddle, ready to aim and fire, if needed. Together, we rode side by side into the camp. There was nowhere to hide, no way to ambush him, so we just rode straight in. His back was to us and so far he was unaware of us, so we had the element of surprise on our side.

There was no time to come up with a plan of attack. Not here, out in the open, with no way to avoid being seen. I swallowed angrily, annoyed at how woefully unprepared we were. We had to lure him away from camp somehow. If we went storming in, all he had to do was run to Elise, use her as a shield and we would be powerless. There was no way we would risk harming our bride, and he would know it. If he held a gun to our wife's head we would do whatever he asked to save her life. Even if it meant letting her go.

The horses! They would be our distraction. Right now the man who had Elise hadn't seen us, and he wouldn't know who we were. He'd figure it out soon enough, but right now he wouldn't be certain. No hail had fallen out here, the ground was dry, so he would think we were still fighting that fire. We would be too, if the hail hadn't saved us. *The hail that ruined my crop,* I thought bitterly, but I pushed that thought away. Now was not the time for bitterness.

Silently, I slid down from my saddle and ran towards the hobbled horses. There was no time to explain anything to Shane, I would just have to trust that he understood. Somehow, I got to the first one without being seen and I crouched beside it and undid the hobbles. I sent it on its way with a slap on the rump. The second horse whinnied, disturbed by the commotion and a shout rang out from camp. "Hoi! You there!"

I stood up, letting him see me. I cursed myself for leaving the rifle on my horse, but it had been too cumbersome to carry while I ran to the horses. If I needed a firearm I would have to rely on the two pistols I wore. He ran towards me and I couldn't hide my grin. This was going exactly as I had planned! Out of the corner of my eye I could see Shane galloping towards Elise, but I didn't turn my head away from the man running towards me. I was the decoy – I would do my best to keep him distracted until Shane had Elise safely in his arms.

I ran to the second horse and crouched to undo the hobbles. The giant of a man was bearing down on me, getting closer and closer. I would have to act fast. With a tug, I wrenched the hobble free and gave the horse an almighty slap, sending it after its mate.

The man was almost upon me. I watched as his feet left the ground and he launched himself into the air and I rolled out of the way just in time, narrowly dodging his tackle. He was bigger than me but also much older, and his movements were slower. My speed gave me an advantage and I used it. With a roar, he leaped at me again but this time I sidestepped, stood myself up to my full height and withdrew my gun. "Hold it right there mister," I ordered.

For just a second he froze, then he realized what was going on. He spun around to face the camp he'd run from just in time to see Shane running for his horse, Elise in his arms. Before he had a chance to react I raised my gun hand high and brought the butt crashing down against his temple, watching as he staggered then fell to the ground, blood trickling from the gash.

I stood for a moment, in silence, trying to take in the scene around me. It had been easy; too easy. The man had been an incompetent fool and his arrogance, his apparent belief in his infallibility, had been his downfall. Stooping to pick up his feet, I dragged him back to his camp and dropped him under the tree. He'd be out to it for a while, but at least he'd have a fighting chance, being in the shade rather than out under the full sun. I

propped his canteen up next to him for when he woke up. Then I stamped out his fire and walked back to my waiting family: to my best friend and the wife we shared.

“You shoulda killed the bastard,” Shane snarled when I got close enough to hear him but I shook my head. There had been enough destruction today. I did not want to add to it. We had Elise back, that was what mattered.

I looked at Elise. She was slumped in Shane’s arms, her head flopping to the side. I gently righted it, brushing a stray lock of hair back off her face with my fingers and as I did, I noticed the graze on her temple and the bruise coming up on her cheek. The fading outline of a handprint covered the other side of her face. It was easy to figure out what had happened – that bastard had hit her, and the force of the blow had bashed her face against the tree trunk he’d tied her up against. What else had he done to our beautiful bride? I inspected her clothing – nothing was torn. Nothing was out of place.

“Did he?” I nodded at the spot between her legs, that precious place that we had claimed and filled over and over, hoping against hope that he hadn’t violated her.

Shane shook his head. “No. I don’t think so. Her clothes aren’t ripped. If she was being taken for that bastard back east, he wouldn’t want her used. Her virginity would be the most important part about her.”

I nodded. That made sense.

We were both silent for a moment, trying to accept everything that had just happened; wanting to understand it.

“Where the hell are we?” I asked.

“There’s a town about four miles that-away.” Shane pointed.

“That’s closer than Bridgewater,” I said. “Let’s take her there. She’ll need a bath, get her cleaned up and a good feed into her.”

Shane passed Elise to me while he mounted his horse and as I took our bride in my arms she slowly opened her eyes and blinked, looking around in confusion. Terror reflected briefly in her eyes but then her gaze settled on my face and she smiled. Not a proper smile, just a partial one, full of pain, but still, it was something.

“You’re safe now sweetheart,” I assured her gently, bending to kiss her temple. “Just rest for now, there will be time for talking later. Here, I’ll pass you up to Shane.”

I passed her up and her arms immediately wrapped around his neck and she snuggled against him, relief evident in her every pore. She’d obviously been so frightened. Anger coursed through me again and I wished, just for a moment, that I had killed the bastard when I had the chance.

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16

ELISE

I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE it when I opened my eyes and looked up into Roscoe's face. At first I thought I was dreaming. I half expected to wake up and see my captors face, not Roscoe's, inches from my own. I was afraid fear was making me hallucinate and see things that weren't there. But then he spoke, and kissed my forehead, his chapped lips so welcome on my clammy skin, and I knew he was real. Relief overwhelmed me. I was safe! My husbands had found me! Just like I'd told my captor they would. I tried to smile but my face hurt so bad, both from where I'd been hit, and where my face had slammed into the tree. My head was still fuzzy and waves of nausea racked my body.

I wanted to ask him about the fire, and what happened to the bad man who had taken me but I didn't have the energy. I could barely keep my eyes open. My head hurt too much and all I wanted to do was sleep. I fought off the darkness but it engulfed me again, so when he told me to rest, I willingly obeyed him.

Roscoe lifted me up to Shane and my arms went around his neck instinctively. I was safe. His strong arms around me reassured me and although every single muscle in my body was sore, I relaxed. I didn't have to worry anymore. Shane and Roscoe were here.

The rocking of the horse beneath us lulled me back to sleep again but I wasn't frightened anymore. Each step was taking me closer to safety and home, not Philadelphia and Mr. Yates.

I don't know how long we rode for but when I opened my eyes again we were riding into a tiny town, much smaller than the town I had stepped out into when I disembarked the train. Only a few buildings lined the single street and I could only see one horse tied to the hitching post outside the saloon.

"Where are we?" I croaked, for I knew it was not Bridgewater.

"We're going to stop in a hotel for a bit," Shane told me. "Roscoe has gone on ahead to get us a room and a bath. We all need one."

"Oh." I closed my eyes again. Nausea still plagued me and my head was still fuzzy, but I think I was improving. The rest definitely helped. I buried my face back in Shane's shirt then wrinkled my nose in distaste. He stunk! Smoke, mostly. And he was covered in black soot. The fire! How had I forgotten about the fire? The event that had set all this off?

"The man who took me, he set the fire," I told Shane.

Shane gasped and I felt him stiffen. His grip on me tightened.

"He told me," I continued. "And he killed Coleton. Mr. Yates – the man my brother promised me to – was paying him to bring me back to Philadelphia." A sob caught in my throat as I realized just how close Mr. Yates had come to getting what he wanted. I knew that already being married would not have saved me; if anything, it would make things worse. I would feel the full force of Mr. Yates' wrath.

"You're safe now love," Shane assured me. His fingers dug into me so tight they almost hurt. Anger wafted off him like a cloud. I could tell he

wanted to say more but he was a gentleman, and a gentleman watched his language in front of a lady. “Nobody is going to hurt you again, I promise. We won’t let them.”

“Good.” Despite the odor of smoke on his clothes, I snuggled tighter against him, finding protection in his strong arms.

Shane reined up outside a two-story wooden building at the end of the small, dusty street. I held onto the saddle horn while he dismounted, then he reached up and lifted me down, holding me tightly while I wobbled on unsteady feet. I clung to him and soon my legs found their footing and were able to take my weight although I still felt clumsy. I tucked my hand under his arm and followed him inside.

Up in the room Roscoe had arranged for us, a tub full of steaming hot water had been brought up, along with a washcloth, a towel, and a bar of scented soap. It had been a long time since I’d had such luxuries. When Father had been alive we had nice soap, of course. We’d had the best of everything, back then. But once John started gambling away our fortune we had to make do with the soap Cook made. I couldn’t help but smile at the fragrance.

Roscoe had already cleaned himself up, and while he helped me strip off my clothing, Shane splashed water into the washbasin on the stand against the wall and washed his hands and face, getting rid of the black soot that covered him. By the time he turned back to me, his wet hair slicked back, his sleeves rolled up exposing now-clean forearms corded with muscle, he looked a different man.

My husbands’ took a hand each and carefully helped me into the tub. I sighed happily as I sank into the warm water, letting it soothe my aching body. Roscoe dipped the washcloth in the tub and wiped my face, placing a hand on my hair to hold my head still. Between them, they meticulously soaped up every single inch of my body and rinsed me clean, leaving no part of me untouched.

“How much damage did the fire do?” I asked. “Was it as bad as he said?”

“He?” Roscoe asked questioningly.

“The fire wasn’t accidental,” Shane snarled. “That bastard set it. A decoy, to keep us busy while he took Elise.”

“He killed Coleton too,” I said. “His death wasn’t an accident either. He set up the whole thing. Mr. Yates must want me back pretty badly.”

“He’s not having you,” Roscoe growled. “You’re ours. And we mean to keep you.” He frowned angrily. “I should have killed that bastard while I had that chance, you were right,” he said to Shane.

From my perch in the bath I looked up at the face of my men, watching the anger flit across them. Their fists were clenched so tight the muscles in their forearms popped up.

“I’m glad you didn’t kill him,” I said softly. “Knowing that you showed compassion to a man that didn’t deserve it, makes me love you more.” Roscoe’s hard expression softened and he looked at me tenderly. I’m sure it was love that shone in his eyes. “But you didn’t tell me how much damage was done.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Shane said.

“I want to know,” I pleaded.

Shane and Roscoe looked at each other and sighed. What were they hiding from me?

“The fire destroyed my smithy,” Shane said sadly. “But I can rebuild. I think some of it will be salvageable. Thanks to the hailstorm, the fire didn’t spread any further. No homes or lives were lost.”

“But the hailstorm ruined my crop,” Roscoe growled bitterly. “All that work…. Gone. Just like that.” Emotions I didn’t recognize flitted across his face. What was he thinking? Despair, obviously. But what else? I couldn’t tell. Insecurity? Uncertainty? I wasn’t sure. I wasn’t good at reading men. Lady Margaret’s School for Girls had taught me to stay out of men’s affairs.

Ladies were to occupy themselves with other things and let the menfolk take care of business. But I had money, and I wanted to help. By the sounds of things, my men had lost pretty much everything, and it was all my fault.

“I have money,” I told them. “Four Gold Eagles. It was all I could hide from John. I sewed it into the lining of my skirt, the one I wore when you found me. I want you to have them. Buy more seed, or whatever it is you need.”

“We don’t need your money,” Shane snarled, sounding insulted, and I looked up at him, wounded. I didn’t understand. Why wouldn’t he let me help? Was it pride? I knew all about male pride and how dangerous it could be. I’d seen it in John. And in Mr. Yates. I had no idea it inflicted my husbands as well.

“Why not? It’s my fault the crop was ruined.”

“You control the weather, do you?”

I couldn’t help but grin. Shane had a point. I couldn’t control the weather any more than I could hold back the tide. But the fire… if I hadn’t left Philadelphia, if I hadn’t run away from Mr. Yates, Shane’s smithy would still be standing. Of that, I was certain.

“The fire was my fault,” I insisted. “If I had just gone along with what John wanted and married Mr. Yates…”

Shane cut me off. “No.” He grabbed my upper arm and hauled me up out of the water roughly, so I was standing up in the tub. He held me steady. “No don’t say that,” he growled. “Not ever.”

Before I could react, he drew back his hand and spanked my wet bare bottom sharply, one, two, three times. The spanking was not as hard as the one he’d given me on the prairie, but on wet skin, in my fragile state, it stung. I cried out as tears filled my eyes. Shane lowered me back into the bathtub.

Roscoe crouched down beside the tub and took my chin in his hands, forcing me to look at him. “Shane is right,” he scolded. “I don’t want to

ever hear you say those words again, do you hear me? None of this is your fault. You have done nothing wrong! Your brother had no right to sell you off to pay his gambling debts, especially not to someone cruel. Nobody should be treating you in that way. You are not to blame for any of this!"

I squirmed uncomfortably at the hardness of the tub. My bottom burned and throbbed. Roscoe looked at me sternly and because I couldn't look away, I blinked back at him, feeling sorry for myself. My bottom hurt, my head still hurt, and all I had wanted to do was help. Why couldn't they understand that?

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I only wanted to help."

"I know." Roscoe's voice was gentle. He bent forward and kissed my cheek, the one that hadn't scraped against the tree. "And we appreciate it." He let go of my chin and took my hand instead. Shane crouched down on my other side and picked up my other hand, gently squeezing my fingers.

"My father said I would never amount to anything," he told me, pain in his voice, and my heart hurt for the man I loved, hearing those words from his father. "So it's important to me that I make something of my life, by myself," he explained.

I nodded. I understood. At least, I think I did. His words made sense, even if I didn't really understand the reasoning behind them. What was wrong with accepting help when it was offered? But I held my tongue. There was a lot about men that I still had to learn.

"Hold onto your money," Roscoe said. "One day we may have need of it. I may need some of it myself, as you said, for more seed. But let me have a proper look at my crop first. I haven't had a chance yet. Perhaps the damage is not as great as I first thought."

I nodded again, looking down at my bath.

"But right now we have something important to do," Shane said. "We're going to make you ours."

Heat shot to my core in anticipation. Them claiming me, however they wanted to, was something I would never object to.

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17

SHANE

ELISE'S EYES sparked with excitement when I told her we were going to make her ours and her enthusiasm made my cock hard. She didn't even know what we were going to do yet and already, she was keen.

"Stand up," I told her, "and sit yourself on the edge of the tub. Spread your legs." She looked confused. "We're going to shave you. Our wife is going to have a nice smooth pussy. When we're licking your clit, we don't want any barrier between our mouths and your skin."

I watched her closely and was pleased when she didn't flinch. She obeyed immediately, standing up and perching herself on the edge of the tub just as I had asked. I pressed my hand between her legs, pushing her thighs further apart, tilting her pelvis further forward with a hand on her back.

"Hold still," I commanded as I dipped the soap in the water and rubbed it on the thatch of soft, curly hair nestled between her thighs, working the soap up to a rich lather.

Roscoe took a cut-throat razor from his saddlebag and opened it out, testing the blade against his thumb. I knew it to be sharp; I had sharpened it on the strop myself. He handed the razor to me, then stood behind Elise, supporting her body, holding her still. It wouldn't do for her to move.

Using small, even strokes, I carefully shaved her bare. Above her pussy, down her labia, the inside of her thighs. The blade slid easily over the curves of her womanhood and I watched the soap and hair mix together and fall away.

"Breathe," I heard Roscoe telling her, but I didn't look up from my task. I didn't want to cut her, nor did I want to miss a single blade of hair. She was trembling and I knew she had her body braced tight against Roscoe, every muscle in her body taut.

"Relax," I crooned softly. "It's not going to hurt." And slowly, she did.

When I was sure I had removed everything, I dipped the cloth into the water and wiped her clean, rubbing my hand over her mound to check. Her bare skin quivered under my touch. I ran one finger up and down her slit a couple times then parted her labia so I could see her little pleasure nub. Without the protection of hair, it would be far more sensitive. She gasped, thrusting her pussy forward against my hand and I chuckled. So demanding! Just the way we liked it.

"Slide back in the water my love, rinse off," I commanded softly, stifling my groan. My swollen cock throbbed against my pants, begging to be released. I couldn't wait to sink it inside her. I glanced across at Roscoe. He was just as worked up as I was. But we would wait until our bride was fed and rested, we wouldn't take her now. We wanted her to enjoy our fucking as much as we did.

While Roscoe helped her rinse all the soap from her body, I turned down the bed in the middle of the room. There was only the one, but it would be big enough for all of us. Me on one side, Roscoe on the other, Elise sandwiched in between. When I turned around, she was standing

naked beside the tub, her pert breasts heaving with every breath she took, her legs slightly apart exposing her freshly bare, pink pussy and Roscoe was rubbing her dry with the towel. I imagined this scene playing out every night for the rest of our lives – rubbing Elise dry in our little cabin, turning down the bed, snuggling up next to her naked body. Making her scream with pleasure. Sharing her between us. And I couldn't think of anything better.

"Are you hungry?" I asked, knowing that she must be famished. I doubted she'd eaten all day, but she shook her head.

"You need to eat," Roscoe said. "It will help with the shock. Just a few bites." Without waiting for an answer, he strode to the door. "I'll go get some chow. I expect to see you in bed and resting when I return," he said, wagging his finger at her.

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18

ELISE

ROSCOE PULLED the door firmly shut behind him, leaving me alone in the small hotel room with Shane. My head was starting to clear now, and I didn't hurt so much anymore. But my whole body felt so alive! My pussy tingled where Shane had shaved it and I felt myself blush. Aunt Nellie certainly hadn't told me anything about that! Did she know how scandalous it was, being completely bared, opened and shaved *there*? Did she have any idea how delightful each scrape of the razor against that sensitive area felt? Did she know it made sparks shoot up and down my spine, spreading their heat inside me until I felt like I would explode? Had she ever experienced the sensations the razor left behind?

I slid between the crisp sheets, reveling in their luxuriousness. Just like the fragrant soap, starched linens had been a luxury I had taken for granted in my previous life in Philadelphia. I sighed happily as I tugged the covers up to my chin.

“Don’t go getting too comfortable, my love. We have to put your plug in.”

“Do we have to?” I asked.

Shane nodded. “We do. We’ll be fucking you later, both of us. You need to be prepared.”

Fucking you later, both of us swam in my head. This was something else that neither Aunt Nellie nor Lady Margaret’s School for Girls had taught me about. No doubt Aunt Nellie would be scandalized at the mere thought of two men taking me at once, never mind the actual act. How would it work, anyway? Would they… I felt the slight change in my body as I thought of it, imagined my men claiming me completely. The tingle of arousal that set my nerve endings on fire and made my heart beat rapidly. Even the air changed, becoming too thick to breathe.

“Roll over,” Shane commanded, interrupting my thoughts. My eyes widened at the sight of the glass plug, already prepared with oil. Did that thing really fit inside me so easily? I knew it would, I had worn it before, but it shocked me that my bottom hole was able to stretch so wide and accommodate something so large. *Roscoe’s cock is larger. So is Shane’s,* I reminded myself.

Despite my best intentions, I felt my face flame as I slowly rolled over in the bed, lying on my tummy, my forearms cushioning my head.

I clenched my buttocks automatically when Shane touched me, knowing what he was about to do, but he spread out the fingers of his large hand and rubbed my bottom in circles, relaxing me. Were there still handprints on my skin where he had spanked me? I was curious, but he didn’t say, and I was too shy to ask. The sting had long since faded, leaving only a tiny bit of tenderness. The tingling in my traitorous body increased at the remembered spanking. How was it possible that a few firm swats to my bare bottom could have such an effect on me? Was that normal? It was something else that neither Aunt Nellie nor Lady Margaret’s School for Girls had

mentioned. I was beginning to realize that my education in such matters had been woefully inadequate. How was I ever to have a hope of pleasing two men when I was so naïve and inexperienced?

Shane's fingers slid down the cleft between my cheeks, spreading my bottom apart. I sucked in a humiliated breath and buried my face tighter against my arms. I was so glad he couldn't see me! Mortification flooded me but that telltale tingling of arousal increased even more. What was wrong with me? I was certain I had to be flawed. No proper lady should be finding pleasure in such actions, surely?

I tensed and held my breath as he pressed the cold, hard tip against my forbidden hole. Butterflies danced inside me as the glass bulb slowly breached my entrance and I pushed back against it, just as I'd done last time, exhaling as Shane slid the plug steadily home. I whimpered at the momentary pain but the burn wasn't as intense as I remembered and once the plug was fully seated inside me, it didn't hurt at all. In fact, it was a rather pleasant feeling of fullness. But still, I kept my face hidden. This was scandalous, surely? Nice ladies didn't have their bottoms plugged, did they? And they definitely didn't like it.

Shane patted my bottom, directly over the plug, sending a delicious ache through me. "Under the covers now my love," he ordered softly. "You remember how Roscoe wants to find you."

"I'm not tired," I grumbled, but it was a lie. Although desire ripped through my body, my head was still a bit foggy, and I wanted nothing more than to lie back and sleep off the effects of being kidnapped.

"You know what happens when you lie," Shane warned me. A shiver rippled up my spine at the threat in his words. I did know what happened, and it involved unpleasantness. An unpleasantness that led into a deep ache of longing.

Lyin' brides get spanked, echoed in my head, spoken in Roscoe's deep, sexy baritone. Would he spank me even with this plug embedded deep in

my ass? I decided I didn't want to find out. I scrambled under the covers gingerly, mindful of the plug inside me, but I discovered it didn't hurt at all.

I had just gotten comfortable when Roscoe returned with a steaming plate piled high with beef stew. It smelled so good it made my mouth water and my tummy rumbled, belying my earlier insistence that I wasn't hungry. The nausea that had plagued me earlier was completely gone. He sat down on the edge of the bed and turned to face me, scooped up a forkful of aromatic stew and brought it to my lips. Instinctively, I opened my mouth and he fed me like I was a small child.

I reached out to take the plate and the fork but Roscoe shook his head. "No, lie back. Let us take care of you."

Shane went to eat, leaving me alone in the room with Roscoe. The man I had wed smiled at me. He was so handsome when he smiled, happiness lighting up his whole face, laughter lines crinkling the corners of his eyes. We didn't speak. Roscoe didn't seem to be the type of man who engaged in small talk so I just lay back and let him feed me. I didn't have the energy to make one-sided conversation. There would be plenty of time later to get to know my husbands.

It wasn't long before Shane was back, having eaten his fill at the restaurant downstairs. I had eaten far more than I thought I would and had just pushed the plate away when Shane returned.

"You're looking much better," he said as he approached the bed where Roscoe and I still sat. "The rest and meal has done you good." He was right – I did feel much better. Almost back to my normal self.

I nodded.

"That's good. Because we need you feeling well for what we've got planned for you."

A shiver shot up my spine at his words. I had a fair idea of what they were planning and it made the hair on the back of my neck stand up with excitement.

Shane bent to take off his boots. Roscoe got to his feet. My two husbands stood side by side, their eyes fixed on me. A storm erupted deep in my belly as slowly, their gazes not leaving mine, they shed their clothes. My heart pounded erratically against my rib cage and my pulse raced as they stripped for me, muscles rippling in their torsos. Individually, they were impressive men. But together, they were unbelievable. My breath came in ragged gasps, in time with the throbbing and pulsing between my legs. My breasts were hot, achy and tight. I couldn't think of anything else but the men undressing in front of me.

I held my breath as they sat down on either side of me, the bed sinking beneath their weight. I was trembling, but not from fear or cold. It was arousal. I recognized the pricks of desire now; a longing that only my men could fill.

Without a word, Roscoe turned me onto my side and tapped the plug embedded in my bottom. Shane rested his hand on my shoulder. He was in front of me, Roscoe was behind. I was trapped between them. Right where I belonged.

"We don't need this anymore. I'm going to fill your bottom with my cock instead," Roscoe growled. Swiftly, he removed the glass plug and discarded it on the floor, leaving me aching and empty.

Shane pressed his cock against my slick pussy. "You're so wet," he murmured. "Just how I like it."

Behind me, the head of Roscoe's cock was at my most private hole. I gasped as his finger smeared cold oil over my tight rosebud and his cock pressed harder.

So this was what it was like to have two husbands. My head swam. Two pairs of hand touching my body. Two sets of thick thighs sandwiching mine. Two huge cocks about to invade my body. A hot wave of need rushed through me.

"Please," I begged.

“Please what?” Shane asked in a teasing voice. “Tell us what you want.”

“I want you,” I gasped. “Both of you. To…” I couldn’t say the word.

“You want us to what?”

“I want you to… to…” my face flamed. My men waited, their cocks held there, against me, teasing. “I want you to fuck me.”

“Like this?” Slowly, Shane pressed just the tip of his cock inside me, giving me just a taste of what was to come.

“Yes!” I cried, grinding my pelvis against him. “Please!”

Shane obliged me. In a single movement, he slid inside me easily, right to the hilt and I clenched around him, rocking my hips a bit, showing him what I wanted.

“And like this?” Roscoe asked, pressing his cock against my tight entrance, making me freeze.

“Yes,” I whispered, not daring to breathe.

I gasped at the fiery burn of Roscoe’s cock stretching my forbidden hole wide. He was so much bigger than the plug! The burning intensified as he entered me slowly, gently, and I held my breath.

“Push back against me,” Roscoe commanded in a harsh whisper and I did, whimpering as he sunk deep inside me, burying his cock in me completely. The burning eased, replaced by a delicious fullness. My men held themselves still, letting me get used to the feel of two cocks. One in each hole. Filling me. Claiming me.

“Ours,” Roscoe growled, squeezing the fleshy part of my bottom, rocking inside me.

I cried out with desperate, aching need at the sensations that zipped through me.

Shane withdrew then pulled me towards him, sliding me forwards off Roscoe’s cock, filling my pussy. I groaned at the emptiness. Then he pushed me backwards, Roscoe’s cock impaling me fully again, leaving my pussy empty, bereft. First one hole then the other, one full, the other empty. The

sensations ripping through me got stronger and stronger with each thrust, each filling, each emptying.

They fucked me in tandem, building up a rhythm – forward, back, forward, back – taking me alternately, first filling my pussy, then my bottom, but never both at once. Tormenting me. The movements getting faster and faster. My moans and whimpers getting louder and louder with each thrust.

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. I could only feel. The double penetration doubled the exquisite sensations within me and I felt like I was flying. They fucked me faster and faster, harder, more urgently, threatening to make the molten lava within me erupt. A scream of pleasure rose up inside me, getting stronger with every movement my men made as they claimed me possessively, in the most primal of ways.

My husbands were in charge. They fucked me as they wished – they set the pace, they decided how much to fill me - and I stayed helpless between them, unable to do anything but take what they gave me, every cell of my body begging for more.

Then the rhythm changed and instead of alternating, both men withdrew at once, leaving me empty, open to their gaze. Then, together, they slammed back inside me, both at the same time, claiming me completely. They withdrew again, leaving just the very tips of their cocks inside me, waiting for my tormented moan before they filled me again. Over and over and over.

"Do you like being fucked like this?" Shane asked, arousal turning his voice to gravel.

"Yes!" I cried, wanting more, more.

"This is what it means to be ours," Roscoe said, as my men filled me completely again.

"Yes!" I cried again as my men held my hips and moved, their cocks leaving me and filling me with long, deep, slow strokes. Each powerful

thrust taking me closer and closer to the edge of the abyss where I knew I could fly.

Together, they withdrew and sunk deep into me again, Shane fingered my swollen clit and Roscoe slapped my bottom lightly and the sensations overwhelmed me, my mind completely shredded. I let out the scream that had been building within me as Roscoe groaned and Shane shuddered, filling me with their seed, the earth shattering around us. Hot liquid shot into me, mixing with the heat that already burned in my core, lifting me up and flying me away. Waves of pleasure crashed over me, again and again, each wave growing more intense.

The earth exploded for a long time, stars orbiting in front of my eyes and my whole body pulsed and shook. For a moment, I didn’t know where I was. I knew only that intense happiness rushed through me, and I was safe. Safe in the arms of my men.

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EPILOGUE

ROSCOE

Twelve Months Later

I stood in the doorway of our cabin and watched our beautiful wife rub a hand over her swollen belly. Full with our child. I longed to wrap my arms around her from behind, place my hand on her tummy and feel the movement, the kicking, of our son or daughter. But she hadn't noticed me yet, so for now, I would just watch. The sunlight streaming in the open door made her golden hair gleam. Today she'd left it unpinned, tumbling wildly over her shoulders, just the way Shane and I liked it.

I'd just come in from the fields, from checking on my crops. The harvest would be bountiful this year, perhaps the best I'd ever had. Bridgewater soil was good for growing. The flourishing vegetable garden Emma had helped Elise establish behind the cabin was proof of that. Elise took great pride in preparing us simple dishes she had prepared, following

Emma’s recipes, with food she had grown herself. And we enjoyed eating them.

Shane would be home soon, too. He was hard at work in the smithy we had rebuilt. His reputation as a blacksmith was known all over this part of the Montana Territory and business was brisk. He almost had more work than he could handle and would soon have to hire a boy to help him. But we liked to eat the midday meal together and it was almost noon so, as busy as he was, he would put it aside for a while.

My eyes were drawn to the pile of baby gowns stacked on a chair in the corner. Elise had been busy sewing, and so had some of the other ladies of Bridgewater. A baby was thought of as a blessing in this community, and our baby was no different. He or she would certainly be well loved.

Yesterday I’d brought Elise the news that Roger Yates was dead. She hadn’t wanted to know how he died. Just knowing that he was dead was enough, she said. She could breathe easy now: she was safe. She hadn’t asked about her brother. Maybe, in her mind, he was dead too.

The headline called him ‘one of Philadelphia’s wealthiest men’ but Shane and I were the rich ones. We had Elise. For an accidental bride, she was turning out to be an excellent wife. She had quickly learned all the skills she needed to survive, and thrive, out here, and she took care of Shane and I well, both physically and sexually. No matter how often we took her, she was always eager for more.

I entered the kitchen. Immediately, Elise turned, saw me, and smiled. Love shone in her eyes. She came to me, wrapped her arms around my neck and kissed me full on the lips. She ground her pelvis against me, making it clear what she wanted.

“You are insatiable!” I pretended to scold, but I wasn’t cross. I could never be cross with such a willing woman.

“I can’t help it if you please me so,” she said, happiness and laughter clear in her voice.

Yes, I thought. Shane and I were definitely the rich ones. Elise had enriched our lives immeasurably.

The End.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

USA Today Bestselling Author Kelly Dawson is an erotic romance writer from the very bottom of the world – the South Island of New Zealand, to be exact. She lives with her very own romance novel hero husband and four awesome kids.

Her love of horses and cowboys also flows through to her books. She grew up loving them – probably thanks to her father who introduced her to rodeos, western movies and western books at a young age and got her a pony when she was 10.

She writes across several genres, all under the umbrella of kinky, spanky erotic romance.

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